

Disability Community Expresses Outrage at the Murder of Jordan Neely

*Calls on the City and the State to Appropriately Serve
New Yorkers Living with Mental Health Conditions*

Jordan Neely's heartbreaking, haunting, and cruel murder was a direct result of our City's and our State's systemic failures to provide a comprehensive continuum of services and support with appropriate follow up and accountability.

There is ample evidence that Mr. Neely had contact with a broad array of shelters, clinics, hospitals, street outreach teams, case management programs, and criminal justice and social service organizations. Our systems had more than a decade to meaningfully engage Mr. Neely and to provide him with sustained follow-up services and supports. Yet, at the time of his death, he had been identified by the City as one of the "top 50" homeless individuals most urgently in need of assistance and treatment.

We often speak of our goal to provide a "no wrong door" system of mental health access. Mr. Neely, in fact, entered our system through several doors, but we failed him each time. We are too quick to label people as "hard to serve" and "non-compliant," rather than acknowledge our system's inability to effectively engage and support people in profound need with appropriate, effective, and voluntary measures.

On Monday afternoon, Mr. Neely was riding the subway, complaining of hunger and thirst, saying that he was tired — that he didn't care if he went to prison and that "it doesn't even matter if I died."

Mr. Neely's desperate sense of despair may have been disturbing or even frightening to some, but it cannot be used to justify being choked to death on the floor of a City subway car. Tragically, he

met all four of the qualifications to be unjustifiably considered to be dangerous: he was a Black, male, homeless individual living with major mental health challenges.

We have to answer the question posed on social media – does anyone think there is a Black man alive in this country who could walk up to a white person, in public, choke him to death in full view of other passengers and have it captured on video, and then just walk away after a brief chat with the police?

We must take action to respond to mental health crises with a public health rather than a criminalizing response that only drives people away and that fails to recognize that people with major mental health and trauma-related challenges are typically 11 times more likely to be victims rather than perpetrators of violence and no more likely to be violent than those who do not have such challenges.

This is also the time to assign accountability to City and State leaders whose policies promote a coercive approach that drives away people in need, vastly underfund overwhelmed and understaffed community services, and turn the public against the disability community.

What we need is a system that succeeds in engaging people like Jordan Neely, that remains involved, and that identifies an agency to take the primary role in coordinating each individual's services and resources to promote their safety and recovery. What we must not tolerate are policies such as those recently introduced by Mayor Eric Adams that promote detention by police of individuals who are merely perceived to have a mental health diagnosis, even when they do not present a danger to themselves or others.

We owe it to the memory of Jordan Neely to do all we possibly can to support people in similar circumstances, to show that it indeed matters if they live or die.

504 Democratic Club
Bronx Independent Living Services
Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled
Cardozo Bet Tzedek Legal Services
CASES
Center for Disability Rights (Rochester)
Community Access
Daniels Law Coalition
Families Together in New York State
Finger Lakes Independence Center
Fountain House
Hands Across Long Island
Harlem Independent Living Center
Independent Living, Inc
Mental Health Association of New York State
Mental Health Empowerment Project
Mobilization for Justice
New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services
New York Association on Independent Living
New York City Justice Peer Initiative
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
Northern Regional Center for Independent Living
Police Reform Organizing Project
Regional Center for Independent Living (Rochester)
Restoration Society, Inc
Seat At The Table Campaign
Staten Island Center for Independent Living
Taconic Resources for Independence, Inc
Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project
VOCAL-NY