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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**TRIANGLE SHIRTWAIST FIRE REDUX:**

**LAWSUIT DEMANDS JUSTICE FOR JANITORS LOCKED IN**

**BRONX GROCERY STORES OVERNIGHT**

NEW YORK, March 25, 2005—MFY Legal Services, Inc. filed a lawsuit in Bronx County Supreme Court today on behalf of three former nighttime janitors at two Bronx grocery stores that locked the janitors inside overnight without a means of emergency exit. The lawsuit raises charges including false imprisonment and gross negligence and names as defendants the C Town at 1434 Jerome Avenue and the C Town at 3220 Third Avenue.

The workers report that the emergency exits at the stores, and many other stores throughout the city, are bolted, padlocked, or gated shut every night while they clean and wax the floors, often using outdated electric and propane-run machines and heavy cleaning chemicals.

The lawsuit follows on the heels of an ongoing campaign by the Brooklyn-based Fifth Avenue Committee, which uncovered more than 30 stores that routinely locked in cleaning personnel overnight.

“Most people think this type of thing ended a hundred years ago,” said Amy Carroll, MFY Staff Attorney, “but these janitors face the same dangers as the workers who died in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire 94 years ago today.”

Said Antonio M., one of the plaintiffs, “My desire is to work safely and for everyone to know that we were being locked in – and I’m not keeping quiet about it. I want grocery store owners to at least give us a way out in case of an emergency.”

While Fire Department inspections last year prompted a temporary abatement of the lock-ins in some stores, workers reported the practice resumed quickly, in clear violation of the city building code and health and safety laws. “It’s time to hit the stores in the pocketbook and give the workers a way to stand up for their rights,” said Michelle De La Uz, Executive Director of the Fifth Avenue Committee.

MFY Legal Services, Inc. has provided free civil legal services to low-income New Yorkers since 1963. Its Workplace Justice Project represents low-wage workers on a wide range of employment-related matters. The Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC) is a nationally-recognized, non-profit community development organization working for the advancement of social and economic justice in South Brooklyn.

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