

February 22, 2024

Hon. Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
New York State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
Majority Leader, New York State Senate  
188 State Street LOB - Room 907  
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Carl Heastie  
Speaker, New York State Assembly  
New York State Capitol Room 349  
Albany, NY 12247

**Re: Public Defenders and Indigent Legal Services Attorney Across New York Call on Governor and Legislature to expand loan assistance in FY25 budget via S4511C(Ramos) A1568FD (Simon)**

Dear Governor Hochul, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie:

We, the over 600 undersigned public defenders and indigent legal services attorneys call on the Legislature to include in the FY 25 budget the **\$4 million dollars needed to fund the modest expansion of the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) District Attorney and Indigent Legal Services Attorney Loan Forgiveness (DALF)** program. In doing so, we urge you to adopt the legislative framework for the expansion found in **S4511C (Ramos) A1568D (Simon)**.

It is a well known fact that public defender offices and legal services offices have been suffering from high rates of attrition in recent years. Low salaries and high law school debt burdens mean that too often, it is impossible for attorneys to remain in these vital roles that serve fellow New Yorkers. When attorneys turn to private sector jobs after being trained and gaining the skills to excel in these vital jobs, New Yorkers in need of their services are left behind as offices deal with larger caseloads and fewer experienced attorneys able to handle more complex cases. This crisis was again brought to a head by the October 2023 end of the federal pause on student loan repayments; restarting a grueling monthly loan payment regime that only has hope of relief after 10 full years of service to the public when we become eligible for federal loan cancellation.

**But you, our elected leaders, can take action now to relieve this enormous financial burden.**

The modest expansion of the HESC/DALF program in S4511C/A1568D, if passed in the FY25 budget, can have an *immediate* effect for all eligible attorneys who started up loan repayment this past fall. By passing this crucial bill, one which crosses the aisle with the vociferous support of institutional defender offices, civil defender offices *and* District Attorney offices; New York can lead the country in modeling debt relief for those of us working to serve the public.

Since the inclusion of public defenders and civil services attorneys in the DALF Program in 2009, law school tuition has grown dramatically. According to the American Bar Association, lawyers graduate with an average debt of \$130,000<sup>1</sup>. Yet, the award has remained capped at \$3,400 per year with only six years of eligibility equal to a possible \$20,400 of total award. Moreover, public interest attorneys and district attorneys lag behind both licensed registered nurses who graduate with an average debt of \$55,000<sup>2</sup> and are eligible for up to \$40,000 in HESC award and social workers, who graduate with an average debt of \$76,000<sup>3</sup> and are eligible to receive up to \$26,000 in the HESC award.

S.4511C / A.1568D will right size the award program by both expanding the total eligible award *up to* \$64,000 and the period of eligibility, allowing attorneys to now apply in our second year of work up until our tenth year when we will presumably be eligible for federal loan cancellation.

HESC DALF money is one of the few sources of student debt relief open to those of us with private student loans. Attorneys of color and first-generation borrowers are more likely to hold private student debt that cannot be discharged via Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) or other federal programs. For attorneys who grew up in the very communities they serve, making careers in public service sustainable is an important policy that should be honored. We strongly encourage you, our elected representatives, to make the \$4 million necessary to fund this expansion a budget priority.

Student loan cancellation and assistance remains a hugely popular and crucial policy plank both locally and nationally. By endorsing this loan assistance bill you will remove the barriers to building wealth and a secure future here in our state for those of us working in the public interest. Indeed, the Senate passed this bill, championed by Senator Ramos, with overwhelming bipartisan support last year with a vote of 57-1 and on February 6th, 2024 once again unanimously voted the bill out of committee to the floor of the Senate.

By passing S.5411C/A. 1568D in the FY25 budget, New York can lead the way on easing the burden of loan payments for those of us working to serve our fellow New Yorkers and ensure that attorneys providing these critical and legally mandated services feel compelled and financially

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/new-findings-published-on-law-school-debt>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/student-loans/student-loan-forgiveness-for-nurses/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=MAStKYsEIMs%3D&portalid=0>

able to remain in their roles as passage will ensure that some measure of debt relief will now be on the horizon.

We, your constituents, working to serve fellow New Yorkers as public defenders and indigent legal services attorneys urge you to include this modest funding and crucial legislative framework in the FY25 final budget.

Sincerely,

Abhi Hu	The Bronx Defenders
Abhinav Dantuluri	Brooklyn Defender Services
Abigail Sloan	The Legal Aid Society
Abigail Whipple	Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo
Adam Bryant	The Bronx Defenders
Agnieszka Deenihan	Queens
Alaina Dartt	Legal Aid Society
Aleena Pasha	BDS
Alejandra Collado	Center for Family Representation
Alejandra Diaz Figueroa	The Legal Aid Society
Aleksandra Ciric	Legal Aid Society
Alex Brown	Queens Defenders
Alex VanRooyen	Neighborhood Defender Service
Alexander Hu	New York Legal Assistance Group
Alexander Katz	Brooklyn Neighborhood Office - Civil Practice
Alexandra Goodley-Espinosa	TakeRoot Justice
Alexandra Haris	Brooklyn Defender Services

Alexandra Katz	The Bronx Defenders
Alexis Epstein	Legal Aid Society NYC Bronx office
Alice L Fontier	NDS Harlem
Alice Thompson	Bronx Defenders
Alicia Mason	The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Neighborhood Office
Alisha Bacchus	The Legal Aid Society
Alison Kaplan	Bronx Civil - Benefits Unit
Allie Cabibbo	The Legal Aid Society Queens Civil
Allison Cabibbo	LAS CIVIL QUEENS
Allison Wilkinson	The Legal Aid Society
Alodie Efamba	Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem
Alyssa Couture	Bronx Civil
Alyssa Couture	Bronx
Amal Alzendani	NYLAG
Amanda Donnelly	Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem
Amanda Jack	The Legal Aid Society
Amanda Lipari	The Legal Aid Society
Amelia Spencer	Brooklyn Defender Services
amy armstrong	neighborhood defender service of harlem
Ana Maria Cardenas	NYLAG
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Andra Brumberg	Legal Aid Society
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Andrea Nieves	New York County Defender Services

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Annalise Minello	Brooklyn Defender Services
Anne Leonardo	Bronx Defenders
Anne Mathews	Bronx Defenders
Annette Lee	The Bronx Defenders
Annie Rozzo	The Legal Aid Society, Bronx
Anthony Posada	The Legal Aid Society
Antonia House	TakeRoot Justice
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Ashley Johnson	Center For Family Representation
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Aviva Galpert	The Legal Aid Society
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Bailey Thomas	CAMBA Legal Services
Basima Hafiz	New York County Defender Services
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Brittney Curtis	Brooklyn CDP
Brooke Meehan	The Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo
Bryan Fotino	CMS

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Caitlin Miller	The Legal Aid Society, Manhattan CDP
Caitriona Fox	CAMBA Legal Services
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Carlos Ortiz	CMS
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Caroline Shea	Queens Defenders
Carrie Bleakley	Ontario County Office of the Conflict Defender
Casey Dalporto	New York County Defender Services
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Charles McCracken	Legal Aid Society
Charles McCracken	Legal Aid Society, Queens Neighborhood Office

Charlotte Thomas	Children's Law Center
Cheryl Walker	TakeRoot Justice
Chris Imperioli	The Children's Law Center
Christina Corcoran	Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem
Christina Paliogiannis	LAS SI CDP
Christine Bella	CAB
Christine mckeithan	Queens
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Dallas Neely	Brooklyn Defender Services
Dana Leib	Brooklyn Defender Services



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Daniel Curbelo Zeidman	Bronx Defenders
Daniel Hamburg	Center for Appellate Litigation
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Danielle L. Haley	Manhattan CDP
Danielle L. Jackson	NDS-Harlem
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David Byrne	Queens Defenders
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Dena Kesselman	The Legal Aid Society, Juvenile Rights Practice
Devon Milner	NDS Detroit
Diana Nevins	The Legal Aid Society, Queens Criminal Defense Trial Practice

Diana Nevins	Legal Aid Society, Queens Criminal Defense Practice
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Eliza Colón	Bronx defenders
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Elizabeth Grun	Nassau County Legal Aid Society
Ella Nalepka	The Bronx Defenders
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Ellyn Kessler	Legal Aid Society BNO Civil Family/DV
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Emily Van Dyne	Brooklyn Defender Services

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Eric M. Burse	New York County Defender Services
Ernst Theodore Tenemille	Center for Family Representation
Ethan Chiel	The Legal Aid Society - Brooklyn Neighborhood Office
Eugene Toussaint	Queens LAS Criminal
Eulalia Sullivan	Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem
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Evan Henley	Civil Law Reform Unit, The Legal Aid Society
Evan Maxwell Rock	The Legal Aid Society Manhattan Criminal Defense Practice
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Hannah Rosner	Brooklyn Defender Services
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Helen Martinez	Manhattan
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Magdalena Wasnieski	Prisoners' Legal Services of New York

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Marisol Cordero	The Legal Aid Society
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Meghan Walsh	Housing, Civil, Brooklyn
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Melissa Ader	The Legal Aid Society
Melissa Paul- Franklyn	Bronx Juvenile Rights Practice Trial Office
meron tsegai	bronx defenders
Mia Unger	The Legal Aid Society
Michael Kang	Queens Neighborhood Office
Michael Letwin	Retired LAS CDP-Brooklyn
Michael Way	Brooklyn Defender Services
Michal Gross	Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem
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Navruz Baum	NYLAG
Navruz Baum	NYLAG
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Nereen Stewart	Queens Criminal Defense Practice
Nic Shugar	NYLAG
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Nicholas Aquino	Volunteers of Legal Service
Nick Berghall	BNO Housing
Nicole Schill	Brooklyn CDP
Nicole Velazquez	The Bronx Defenders
Nikita Rahman	Bronx Defenders
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Noel Milton	LAS - Bronx (Civil)
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Olivia Whelan, Esq.	Queens Defenders
Orayne Williams	The Bronx Defenders
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Patricia O'Neill	The Bronx Defenders
Patricia Pazner	Appellate Advocates
Patricia Williams	Harlem
Patrick Crisp	CFR
Patrick Crisp	Center For Family Representation
Patrick Neuman	Coalition
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Paula Z. Segal	TakeRoot Justice

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Peter Laumann	Legal Aid Society
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Rachael Williamson-Becker	NDS Detroit
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Rachel M. Patterson	Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem
Rachel Robinson	Legal Aid Society
Rakaia Keefe-Oates	The Bronx Defenders
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Rashad Moore	Center for Appellate Litigation
Raymond Queliz	Queens Defenders
Rebecca B. Rosenfeld	Staten Island CDP
Rebecca Gannon	The Legal Aid Society
Rebecca I Heinsen	Legal Aid Society Manhattan
Rebecca Suldan	Bronx Defenders

Rebekah Cook-Mack	The Legal Aid Society, for affiliation purposes only
Rebekah J. Pazmino	Appellate Advocates
Renate Lunn	New York County Defender Services
Rex Doty	Brooklyn Defenders Services
Rex Doty	Brooklyn Defender Services
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Richard Henry	Ontario County Public Defender's Office
Richell Lisboa	LAS NYC MAN CDP
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Ryan Eustace	Legal aid society
Ryan MacDonald	TakeRoot Justice
S. Maquita Moody	Staten Island CDp
Sadaf Hasan	Brooklyn Defender Services
Sade Ade	Bronx Defenders
Sagine Joseph	The Bronx Defenders
Samantha catalanotto	Bronx defenders



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Samantha LePre	The Legal Aid Society - Juvenile Rights Practice
Samantha Lyons, Esq.	Catholic Migration Services
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Samantha McEvoy	The Legal Aid Society of Nassau County
Samantha Reiser	The Bronx Defenders
Samantha Rudelich	NDS Harlem
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Samuel Alexander Gauthier	Brooklyn
Samuel Claflin	The Legal Aid Society
Samuel Kohn	LAS Civil Bronx
Samuel Steinbock-Pratt	Office of the Appellate Defender
Sarah Chaudhry	LAS CDP-CAB
Sarah DeVita	ICSU
Sarah Dhaouahira	Queens Defenders
Sarah Marie Young	Brooklyn CDP
Scott Turner	Wayne County Public Defender
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Sharila Stewart	The Legal Aid Society
Sharon Lu	Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn CDP

Sharona Levitt	Queens Civil
Sherry Ashkins	The Legal Aid Society
Shirley Luong	The Legal Aid Society
Shona Hemmady	The Legal Aid Society
Simone Berman-Rossi	CDP Brooklyn
Soo Chung	TakeRoot Justice
Sophia Gurulé	The Bronx Defenders
Sophia Gurulé	The Bronx Defenders
Sophie Dalsimer	New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
Sophie Gebreselassie	The Legal Aid Society
Sophie Gebreselassie	The Legal Aid Society
Soula Platis	Legal Aid Society
Spencer Luchs	The Legal Aid Society - Tenant Defense (Queens)
Stacey Kennard	The Bronx Defenders
Star Fernandez-Marin	The Bronx Defenders
Stella Park	Legal Services NYC
Stephanie A. Lowry	Legal Aid Society
Stephanie Christine Del Toro	Legal Aid Society- Queens Housing
Stephanie Pope	LAS-NYC (SI CDP)
Stephanie Ramdhari	Queens Neighborhood Office - The Legal Aid Society
Stephanie Salomon	The Legal Aid Society
Steven Epstein	Barket Epstein Kearon Aldea & LoTurco, LLP
Steven T. Hasty	The Bronx Defenders
Suah Kim	Appellate Advocates

Sungso Lee	The Legal Aid Society
Susan Bryant	New York State Defenders Association
Susan Mintz	Wayne County Public Defender's Office
Sylvia Lara Altreuter	The Legal Aid Society
Tasha N. Ricks	The Legal Aid Society -Brooklyn CDP
Theresa B. Moser	The Legal Aid Society
Thomas Eddy	Law Office
Thomas M. Montella	Queens Defenders
Thomas Palumbo	Legal Aid Society
Timothy JP Bennett	Bronx
Timothy Oriani	Legal Aid Society, Bronx Neighborhood Office
Tina Luongo	The Legal Aid Society, Criminal Defense Practice
Tomas Montella	Queens Defenders
Tracy Hoskinson	Queens Defenders
Tracy McNeil	The Legal Aid Society
Tricia DeFilippis	The Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo, Inc.
Twyla Carter	The Legal Aid Society NYC
Wanda DeOliveira	DeOliveira Law
Wendy Escobar	NYLAG
Weronika Bzura	BXD
Whitney Braunstein	The Bronx Defenders
William A. Lesman	The Legal Aid Society
Willliam Juhn	New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
Wilson Baer	Manhattan CDP

Wilson Melbostad	Brooklyn Defender Services
Wilton Thomas	Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS)
Xhesi Hysi	Legal Aid Society (CAB)
Yaqarra Greene	PRDU
Ying-Ying Ma	Legal Aid Society
Yoedys Guerrero	The Legal Aid Society
Zachory Nowosadzki	Appellate Advocates
Zoe Allen	Legal Aid Society, JRP Appeals Unit
Zoe Russell	The Bronx Defenders
Zoie Mair	Staten Island CDP
Zsa'Queria Martin	The Bronx Defenders