



March 11, 2024

Contact:

Redmond Haskins
Director of Media Relations
The Legal Aid Society
929.441.2384
rhaskins@legal-aid.org

*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Legal Aid, ALAA Laud NY State Senate’s Passage of DALF Legislation to Increase Student Loan Aid for Attorneys Serving the Public Interest

Attorneys Call on Governor Hochul, Speaker Heastie to Fully Enact Legislation to Benefit Low-Income New Yorkers In Need

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society and the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys - UAW Local 2325, in response to the New York State Senate’s passage of [legislation](#) to bolster the New York District Attorney and Indigent Legal Services Attorney Loan Forgiveness Program (DALF), called on Governor Kathy Hochul and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie to take immediate action to ensure that this critical legislation into is enacted into law.

Under the current program, lawyers serving the public interest can receive up to \$3,400 per year, and up to a total of \$20,400 over six years, putting them well behind the award amounts allotted for registered nurses on teaching faculties and social workers, who perform vital work but, on average, carry less debt than public interest lawyers.

The legislation, carried by State Senator Jessica Ramos and Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon, would increase aid up to \$8,000 annually, for up to eight years, or total award eligibility of up to \$64,000 in total.

New York City is currently in the midst of the worst affordability crisis of the last two decades, with half of the city’s households struggling to pay rent, access sufficient food and basic health care, and afford transportation.

Skyrocketing post-pandemic inflation rates and rent prices have also contributed to widespread attrition among public defender and civil legal services organizations, with attorneys being forced to seek higher salaries in the private sector in order to pay their mounting bills. If this trend continues, low-income New Yorkers who rely on these providers will be further marginalized and disconnected from critical legal representation.

“Attorneys serving the public interest play a vital role in our legal system, ensuring that low-income New Yorkers have the zealous representation that they need and deserve,” said **Twyla Carter, Attorney-In-Chief and Chief Executive Officer of The Legal Aid Society**. “But with the return of student loan payments, coupled with New York’s soaring cost of living, rent, inflation, and our inability to compensate staff at a wage commensurate with

the private sector, more are leaving the profession entirely. This harms the people we represent, causes case delays and hinders true access to justice. Increasing student loan assistance could ease this burden, and we call on Albany to enact this legislation immediately.”

“Student loan debt has caused far too many dedicated attorneys to leave public service or to leave New York state altogether,” said **Lisa Ohta, President of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (UAW Local 2325)**. “Ensuring experienced attorneys can remain in their jobs here benefits all New Yorkers and is a worthwhile investment. Increasing the HESC/DALF award would bring immediate relief to our union members and make it possible for them to continue serving their communities for the long-term.”

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The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For over 145 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. <https://www.legalaidnyc.org>