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

***AHEAD OF HEARING, HOMELESS RIGHTS ADVOCATES,
ELECTED OFFICIALS CRITICIZE WRONGHEADED AND
PATERNALISTIC PROPOSAL THAT WILL REQUIRE
WORKING HOMELESS NEW YORKERS TO SAVE 30% OF
THEIR LIMITED EARNINGS***

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, New York State Assembly Member Harvey Epstein, New York City Council Member Stephen Levin, Homeless Services United, Coalition for the Homeless, and Urban Justice Center’s Safety Net Project – ahead of a City [hearing](#) – criticized a [proposed rule](#) that will require working homeless New Yorkers to save 30 percent of their limited income in a government-controlled savings account. Shelter residents required to participate in the Income Savings Program will not be able to access their savings until they secure permanent housing or can document the existence of an emergency that requires immediate access to their funds. The proposed rule responds to a requirement mandated by the State and enacted this past August.

If working single adult shelter residents do not comply, they could face sanctions and could be forced to leave the shelter system. The proposed rule fails to describe the process by which participating shelter residents are to deposit 30 percent of their income, which may require shelter residents to use their limited funds to buy money orders or pay bank fees.

Homeless advocates agree that this proposed rule will increase the bureaucratic barriers homeless individuals encounter when accessing shelters, and that it does not address the root cause of homelessness: the lack of affordable housing for low-income individuals and families. Instead of charging shelter rent and mandating forced savings programs, Albany and City Hall must increase investments in affordable housing, supportive housing, and low-threshold shelters. In the interim, New

Justice in Every Borough.

York City should amend the proposed paternalistic savings plan to ensure that the rights and needs of homeless New Yorkers are better protected.

“Homelessness is not a result of money mismanagement on the part of homeless adults and families, but, rather, it is a direct result of the lack of truly affordable housing for the lowest-income New Yorkers,” said **Josh Goldfein, Staff Attorney with the Homeless Rights Project at The Legal Aid Society**. “We urge the State to repeal all laws requiring both rent and savings programs for shelter residents, and to invest instead in ending homelessness by fully funding Home Stability Support and all 20,000 units of supportive housing pledged by the Governor in 2016.”

“I stand with Coalition for The Homeless and the Legal Aid Society in opposing this misguided proposed rule, which lays out confusing requirements and deprives homeless New Yorkers of their right to manage their own financial affairs while doing nothing to address the basic underlying cause of homelessness: a lack of affordable housing for people with low-incomes. I will work with advocates and my colleagues to repeal the State mandated savings requirement and oppose the implementation of this proposed rule at the City-level,” said **Assembly Member Harvey Epstein**.

“I have serious concerns about the DHS proposed rule,” said **Council Member Stephen Levin**. “Homeless New Yorkers face numerous challenges accessing permanent housing and supportive services— and a forced savings plan takes a one-size-fits-all approach that does not allow for variance in one’s spending lifestyle, but surveils and severely restricts a person’s needed day-to-day budget. In solving our city’s homelessness crisis, we need to focus our energy on structural solutions that move more people into permanent housing and treatment, rather than an individualistic approach that adds greater bureaucratic hurdles to a person’s life. I urge the administration to reconsider this proposed rule and work with state colleagues to immediately overturn the outdated state law it seeks to come into compliance with.”

“It’s ridiculous and paternalistic to say that people are homeless because they can’t manage their money. They are homeless because there is a serious lack of truly affordable housing in New York. This misguided savings plan will achieve little beyond creating more hoops for homeless New Yorkers to jump through in order to get the help they need. We urge the State to repeal laws requiring shelter residents to pay rent or participate in a government-enforced savings plan. If the Governor really wants to reduce homelessness, then he should fully fund Home Stability Support and all 20,000 units of supportive housing that he pledged in 2016. We also urge the Mayor step up and build much-needed housing for homeless New Yorkers rather than simply creating more bureaucratic hurdles for those in the greatest need,” said **Giselle Routhier, Policy Director at the Coalition for the Homeless**.

“Homeless Services United has serious concerns about the income savings program. While we understand savings can be an important part of an independent living plan, we believe that shelter residents have the right to manage their own financial affairs and strongly object to our staff having to enforce a policy that forces people to surrender a portion of their income to the City or be threatened

with the loss of their shelter bed even if that resident can prove they are saving money on their own. We believe shelter staff's energy is better spent building trust and supporting residents with finding affordable housing and achieving financial independence. We hope the City will reconsider this plan," said **Catherine Trapani, Executive Director of Homeless Services United.**

"The proposed forced Income Savings Plan in DHS and HPD shelters is unnecessarily regressive and punitive. Contrary to what this rule implies, homelessness in NYC is not a result of an individual's personal irresponsibility with their income, but rather a reflection of rapid gentrification and the lack of affordable housing. This proposal reportedly passed at the State-level with the support of the De Blasio administration and is eerily reminiscent of efforts by the Bloomberg administration in 2009 to charge rent for shelter, and threatened sanctions for non-compliance. That rule was defeated after shelter residents bravely spoke out during its brief and disastrous rollout. At no point should homeless people be sanctioned and kicked out of shelter for not complying with arbitrary bureaucratic barriers. We call for an immediate halt to implementation of this law in New York City, and an immediate repeal of laws that allow it at the State level," said **Kiana Davis, Policy Analyst, Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center.**

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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 140 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. www.legalaidnyc.org