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

Legal Aid Statement on the Critical Need to Acknowledge White Fragility and Organizations to Become Anti-Racist

(New York, NY) – The Legal Aid Society released the following statement in response to a recent [New York Post Op Ed](#):

“In a recent [New York Post Op Ed](#), the author, a public defender, takes the position that an anti-racist agenda is a chilling doctrine because it invites discrimination and that the theory of ‘white fragility’ is a ‘small minded book which relentlessly insists all white people are racist and need to think about race all the time.’ She denies the existence of structural and institutional racism. Unfortunately, the author is not alone in her view, especially those in public interest. Their position—that by the mere nature of working in public interest and being a public defender you get a pass at looking at your privilege, your role in social dominance and white supremacy. This racist perspective is disgusting and results in Black and Brown people being harmed by individuals in public interest roles, who are entrusted with serving Black and Brown clients and their communities. By virtue of the endemic nature of white supremacy, racism, and anti-Blackness in this country, Black and Brown people are routinely denied access to resources, face state violence, and are exploited by capitalist structures that ensure their marginalization. By ignoring these facts as someone who claims to work in this field, the author shows how they are not only complicit in this system of oppression, but seeks to gaslight communities of color who are vocally demanding change in this country.

As New York City’s oldest and largest social justice law firm and the citywide public defender, founded over 140 years ago, we fight for justice for our clients, low income Black and Brown people, day in and day out. In all three of our practice areas, Civil, Juvenile Rights and Criminal Defense, we advocate against and litigate policies and laws that silence and oppress BIPOC and communities of color. Our staff dedicate their entire careers to the service of others. Yet, despite this work and history, despite the dedication and zealous representation, we have not taken on the internal work needed to build a truly anti-racist workplace. The time to change is now and as an organization we are committing to bravely have the much needed, and long overdue, conversations and engaging in the critical dialogue and discourse concerning racism, transphobia, sexism and intersectionality. Our BIPOC staff and clients deserve nothing less.

The mandate is a simple one. To be anti-racist, to dismantle racism here at LAS, and in every organization, we must all recognize that white supremacy drives every policy and law, every opportunity and every advantage. For those of us who are white, it is a recognition that power and privilege has been granted merely because we are white. While you have dedicated your life to public interest, you cannot do this work effectively and fully unless and until you face that reality and own that you are part of the problem. You cannot stop there, you must actively work to dismantle the systems that lend you privilege and oppress BIPOC people and communities. To push against the deep work needed to change and be threatened by the conversation, is the exact definition of white fragility. It exists, it is not simply a way for an author to sell books. It is used to make excuses for behavior, practice and treatment, and it is a tool used to promulgate white supremacy and the subjugation of BIPOC people. White people have a duty to no longer be silent and a responsibility to confront these systems of oppression and to shun all forms of white supremacy in our society, in our workplaces, and within our hearts and minds. Enough is enough.”

Janet Sabel, Attorney in Chief and CEO

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Dawne Mitchell, Attorney in Charge, Juvenile Rights Practice

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Ciara Walton, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Janelle Roundtree, Director of Employee Relations

Lou Sartori, Pro Bono Counsel and Director

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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.

<https://www.legalaidnyc.org/>