



August 5, 2020

Contact:

Alejandra Lopez
The Legal Aid Society
ailopez@legal-aid.org
(917) 294-9348

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

Legal Aid and Faith Leaders Call on Governor Cuomo To Extend Eviction Moratorium and Adopt Other Essential Measures Needed to Prevent Homelessness and Hunger for the Lowest Income New Yorkers During the Public Health and Economic Crises Caused by COVID-19

(New York, NY) – The Legal Aid Society together with a group of [faith and community leaders](#) today released the following statement calling on Governor Cuomo to immediately take additional temporary measures essential to prevent the human and economic cost of eviction and homelessness and prevent hunger. These measures are essential to helping low-income New Yorkers devastated by the pandemic, disproportionately Black and Brown New Yorkers, and include extending the eviction moratorium which will lapse at midnight tonight unless action is taken.

“These changes are essential to meeting the needs of our clients as they struggle with the impact of the pandemic, but despite our requests, the Governor has failed to act. Today, along with a diverse group of faith and community leaders we renew our call for the adoption of crucial measures to ensure that the needs of low-income New Yorkers are protected,” said **Susan Welber, Staff Attorney in the Civil Law Reform Unit at The Legal Aid Society.**

“While the people of New York State await a Federal Stimulus Package, there are steps our Governor can take right now to alleviate the suffering of New Yorkers whose livelihoods, housing, health, and family stability hang in the balance after COVID-19. He can stop thousands of people from becoming homeless by extending the eviction moratorium. He can cut the red

tape on other forms of assistance that put food on the table for families. He can use his power to make life better for New Yorkers who are hurting in these unprecedented times,” said **The Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer, Executive Director, The Interfaith Center of New York.**

“We encourage the Governor and the State of New York to continue to be exemplars of leadership in response to the coronavirus and COVID-19 by suspending rules that would interrupt financial support for some of the state’s most vulnerable populations. As people of faith called to care for those most in need, we are asking the Governor and his administrators to extend the moratorium on evictions, eliminate the 45-day waiting period for receipt of State-funded cash assistance, and maximize short-term access to aid by eliminating income and resource barriers during this crisis. These steps would effectively address the needs of those in dire circumstances and continue to model for the nation what a compassionate response by government looks like,” said **Frederick A. Davie, Executive Vice-President, Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York.**

“During this challenging time, we ask that the Governor do everything in his power to make sure New Yorkers at risk of losing their housing do not end up on the street and that people in our State needing basic assistance can receive it along with the fundamental dignity they deserve,” said **Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, Executive Vice President, The New York Board of Rabbis.**

“In light of the pandemic, New York is facing an economic catastrophe which promises to be most damaging to the most vulnerable of our citizens. While robust Federal stimulus and added tax revenue is required to avert this crisis, there are some actions the Governor can take right away to ease homelessness, prevent eviction, and grant access to more people to assistance. The bureaucracy and myriad of regulations of these programs can be quite daunting to those who are already struggling and live on the edge. The Governor can take pragmatic action today to help relieve some of these burdens and we encourage him to do so,” said **The Reverend Peter Cook, Executive Director, New York State Council of Churches.**

“It is unconscionable to even consider evictions in the midst of this COVID-19 crisis. The eviction moratorium must be extended. We New Yorkers must stand for the values that make us great – to care for the most vulnerable, to protect the weak and to work every day to redeem our broken world,” said **Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, spiritual leader of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah.**

The demands made by The Legal Aid Society and the faith leaders are as follows:

1. **Prevent the human and economic cost of eviction and homelessness by:**
 - **immediately extending the eviction moratorium that will otherwise expire at midnight tonight, Wednesday, August 5, at which point at least 200,000 New York City households not covered by the Safe Harbor Act, including 14,000 families in New York City who have current warrants of eviction against them, and will be at immediate risk of eviction and homelessness. Untold numbers of households throughout the rest of New York State will also be at immediate risk of eviction because they are not protected by the**

Safe Harbor Act. Surrounding states, including Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Vermont, continue to operate under a moratorium on eviction, and New York State should too.

- **removing barriers to accessing existing rental assistance** such as the requirement that a tenant already be sued in Housing Court to access assistance under the FHEPS program. It makes no sense to needlessly send landlords and tenants into Housing Court at a time when we are all seeking to minimize in-person traffic to protect public health during the COVID-19 crisis.
2. **Prevent hunger and the needless increases in administrative burden on localities** by:
- **suspending the 45-day Safety Net Assistance waiting period** until the crisis is abated because the needs of New Yorkers without income cannot wait 45 days;
 - **modifying income and resource rules to ensure that New Yorkers with no income, or countable income at or under the poverty level – the poorest among us – have access to cash assistance** by suspending the 185 percent of the “standard of need” rule; increasing and expanding access to the earned income disregard; and suspending or increasing resource caps and exclusions so that a household with no income and \$2,500 in 401K savings would not be barred from accessing cash assistance.

As the faith leaders recognized in their letter to the Governor: “The State of New York must live up to its fundamental promise to aid those in need and in so doing likewise help promote the public’s health. We see the fulfillment of this promise as a moral imperative.”

###

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>