



## **The Legal Aid Society and Uptrust Launch Court Date Reminder Text Message Service**

*NYC's Largest Public Defender Office Partners with Innovative Social Justice Technology Company to Reduce Both Failures to Appear in Court (FTAs) and Pretrial Incarceration, and Engendering Safer Policing*

NEW YORK ([PRWEB](#)) August 05, 2020 -- [The Legal Aid Society](#), the City's largest provider of criminal defense and civil legal services, announced today that it is partnering with [Uptrust](#), the social justice communication platform, to reduce the number of Failure to Appear (FTA) incidents, arrest warrants, and pre-trial technical violations in New York City. The partnership will apply Uptrust's innovative and unique two-way communication technology to reduce jail populations and save millions of taxpayer dollars. In light of recent social justice efforts, the communication technology will help more people make their court appearances and reduce police-citizen interactions, resulting in a safer environment for both police and citizens.

"We are proud to partner with Uptrust on this critical technology that will bolster our ability to continue reaching our clients and provide essential information about services and court announcements during this unprecedented pandemic," said Tina Luongo, Attorney-in-Charge of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society. "Keeping our clients informed so that they can go about their daily lives is paramount and will allow us remain engaged with the communities we serve."

The partnership between The Legal Aid Society and Uptrust helps ensure that those individuals released under the State's new bail reform laws will appear in court as instructed and further prove that money bail is not required to ensure court attendance. The Legal Aid Society annually handles criminal court cases across all five boroughs. The text message reminder program begins as the COVID-19 quarantine and social distancing measures continue to take effect. During the pandemic, many criminal court cases have been administratively adjourned due to court closures leaving many individuals without knowledge of their next court date which greatly increases the likelihood a person might miss court. The Legal Aid Society's attorneys will be able to notify clients of their next court appearance, whether they need to appear in person, and if so the safety precautions that have been put into place. And, through the unique, two-way message system, clients are able to respond, continuing attorney-client privilege-related communication.

Uptrust's reminder tool is similar to many modern dentist or doctor appointment applications, but is tailored to the needs of low-income individuals navigating the confusing and dehumanizing criminal justice system. Taking a user-centered approach, the Uptrust platform reinvented the court reminder system in sending personalized text messages to each public defender client from their assigned public defender. The messages act as reminders related to the client's court hearing dates and allows for an additional avenue of communication between attorney and client. The trademarked communication platform also helps remind clients of meetings with their attorney, and to take time off work in anticipation of their court date. In the coming months, Uptrust will roll-out features that allow attorneys and social-workers to refer their clients to local social services to ensure public defender clients know what may be available to them in order to eliminate nights in jail and further disrupting their livelihood.

To date, Uptrust's messaging system has reduced the Failure to Appear rate by more than 50 percent in their partnering jurisdictions. Uptrust is currently working with over 150 public defender offices in 26 states across and the US Territory of Guam — this includes 14 of the 25 largest counties in America.

Local governments spend more than \$9 billion on unnecessary pretrial incarceration, and an additional \$1 billion issuing and enforcing bench warrants when individuals are not present for their court appearance. Beyond the expense, enforcing warrants takes valuable time away from the police that could be spent on crime prevention. It also has the potential of being dangerous work, thus fewer bench warrants for failures to appear keeps both the police and the communities they serve safer.

“Since its beginnings in 1876, The Legal Aid Society has been a national leader in defending the rights of the indigent accused, as well as pushing progressive policies at the city and state level. We are honored to be working with the hundreds of Legal Aid Society attorneys and advocates who fight tirelessly each day to prevent their clients from being incarcerated and to achieve the best possible outcomes, said Jacob Sills, founder of Uptrust. “When individuals are kept out of jail, especially for something like missing a court appearance, families are kept intact, people remain employed and housed, and ultimately their livelihood, is preserved.”

#### ABOUT UPTRUST

Uptrust is a criminal justice system-focused communication and engagement tool helping defendants arrive at court for their scheduled hearings and other mandatory appointments. By improving the relationship between the criminal justice system and defendants, Uptrust has proved to keep low-income defendants out of jail on bench warrants and technical violations, while also saving attorneys time and reducing the cost to the municipality or county. Uptrust currently is contracted with more than 150 public defender offices around the US reaching over 900,000 defendants. Uptrust is a public benefit corporation supported by the Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation, RFK Human Rights, Schmidt Futures and the Heising-Simons Foundation; it has offices in San Francisco, CA and Northampton, MA. To learn more about Uptrust, visit [www.Uptrust.co](http://www.Uptrust.co).

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