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

Legal Aid Urges City and HRA to Halt Plan to Resume Collections Against SNAP, Public Assistance, and Medicaid Recipients During COVID-19 Financial Crisis

Despite Assurances from HRA, Advocates Have Learned that Billings Will Restart on November 1st

NEW YORK, NY – The Legal Aid Society today sent a [letter](#) urging New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) Commissioner Steven Banks to halt the plan to resume billing individuals with existing SNAP, Public Assistance, and Medicaid payment and settlement agreements on November 1, 2020. Despite assurances from HRA in late March that they, along with the NYC Law Department, will pause all agency claims and collections during the COVID-19 emergency, advocates were recently unofficially informed that billings would resume November 1, even amid the ongoing public health and financial emergencies.

Advocates are warning that resuming collections on November 1 will exacerbate the burdens already facing struggling New Yorkers during this unprecedented public health and economic crisis. Moreover, the proposed resumption date is wholly inadequate to assure proper notice after eight months of non-collection and after the Agency promised advocates and consumers that they would work with them to resolve continuing hardship post-crisis.

The letter states:

“New York is continuing to fight the virus and pandemic while it ravages most of the country and at the same time, the COVID-19 emergency has resulted in high levels of unemployment and financial hardship for millions of New Yorkers... The hardest hit in terms of unemployment have been immigrants and people of color, communities which, in our experience, are disproportionately affected by the enforcement actions at issue here.

Applications for and enrollment in SNAP, Cash Assistance, and Medicaid have skyrocketed. Federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, an invaluable lifeline for millions of New Yorkers, has expired. Despite some reopenings, many businesses remain shuttered. Jobs are scarce and economic stability is a long way off, especially as New York attempts to ‘reopen’ safely. Moreover, if billings are resumed, the many individuals who are unable to meet their payments will be forced into litigation in state courthouses, which poses grave individual and public health concerns. Lastly, while we are aware of the fiscal crisis the City faces as a result of the COVID-19 emergency, budget shortfalls must not be met on the backs of struggling New Yorkers.”

As COVID-19 cases are rising across the U.S and in many areas of New York, Legal Aid implores HRA to abandon its plan and continue to halt these collections for the duration of the COVID-19 financial crisis or at least stay collections until 60 days after the Federal Public Health Emergency is lifted to allow adequate notice to affected individuals.

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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.

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