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

Legal Aid, Milbank Issue Final Warning to Mayor de Blasio to Expedite Internet Installation at City Shelters or Face Litigation

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society and Milbank LLP - representing the Coalition for the Homeless - issued a final [warning](#) to Mayor Bill de Blasio demanding that his Administration take the necessary steps to expedite the installation of broadband-based internet at City homeless shelters or face imminent litigation. The absence of broadband services has especially plagued families with children, who have been struggling to access remote learning due to lack of WiFi in the shelter system.

This letter comes in response to the Mayor’s announcement last week that the City “cannot offer a detailed timeline” for WiFi installation and that its goal is to have “all [family] sites complete [by] this summer.” The City’s vague plan to prioritize installation for 27 shelters sometime “this winter” falls woefully short for the thousands of homeless students who need working internet access now.

The City’s reply also confirmed Legal Aid’s understanding that the internet access issue was not an isolated one but a systemic problem affecting as many as 240 shelters across New York City in every borough.

"The timeline announced last week by Mayor de Blasio is a dereliction of the City's duty under state and federal law to ensure that homeless children have reliable access to educational opportunities," said **Susan Horwitz, Supervising Attorney of the Education Law Project at The Legal Aid Society**. "The City can rectify this by immediately allocating the resources to expedite WiFi installation. In the absence of such a solution, too many children residing in shelters will literally be excluded from the virtual classroom for the entire 2020-21 school year."

The letter states:

The DSS proposal is not only a moral and policy abdication; it is a violation of state and federal law protecting homeless youth's equal access to a sound basic education. In the absence of a solution that takes seriously the scale and urgency of the problem, we will have no choice but to take legal action to remedy these violations.

As we have explained, reliable internet connectivity is a necessity, not a luxury, for the City's students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without it, students who attend school fully remotely—estimated at more than three quarters of all New York City students as of this week - are effectively locked out of the classroom. Students who have a hybrid schedule are unable to participate when they are not onsite.

Litigation should be unnecessary to remedy this issue, especially in light of the Mayor's acknowledgment that the status quo is unacceptable. Yet we have received no assurance that the status quo will meaningfully change any time soon. While we remain open to discussions, the time to avoid judicial intervention is running short. The Coalition reserves all rights and remedies.

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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