



November 16, 2020

Contact:

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

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

After Legal Aid Urges City and HRA to Stop Plan to Resume Collections Against SNAP, Public Assistance, and Medicaid Recipients, HRA Suspends Billing Until January 21, 2021

NEW YORK, NY – Following a demand [letter](#) sent by **The Legal Aid Society** on October 13th urging the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) to halt its plan to resume billing individuals with existing SNAP, Public Assistance, and Medicaid payment and settlement agreements during the pandemic, HRA has announced that they will suspend collections for the duration of the Federal Public Health Emergency, which is set to expire January 21, 2021. Moreover, HRA has agreed to additional time for providing adequate notice to affected individuals.

“While we applaud this news, the HRA investigation and collection process remains a huge problem for our clients and all low-income New Yorkers, and the City must address the systemic issues in order to have a more fair and impartial process,” said **Erika Hanson, Staff Attorney in the Health Law Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “We will continue our steadfast advocacy on behalf of our clients and all New Yorkers who are suffering financial hardship during the pandemic and should not be criminalized for accessing the public benefits they need and are eligible for.”

Advocates are continuing to sound the alarm around the HRA investigation and collections process in New York, which is deeply flawed and rife with due process violations. In many cases, beneficiaries are eligible for Medicaid for all or part of the period of the investigation yet those facing investigations frequently are pressured, even intimidated, into signing settlement

agreements they cannot afford, are forced into collections, or sued, plunging them into life-crushing debt just when they have started to get back on their feet. Those impacted are often immigrants, those with limited English proficiency, and the working poor.

In early October, Legal Aid learned that HRA would resume billings November 1, despite assurances from the agency that they, along with the NYC Law Department, would pause all agency claims and collections during the COVID-19 emergency. Advocates warned that resuming collections on November 1 would exacerbate the burdens already facing struggling New Yorkers during this unprecedented public health and economic crisis.

###

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>