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

Legal Aid Releases 2021 Statewide Civil Law Reform Priorities to Address Income Inequality, Poverty, Homelessness, Protect Low-Income Tenants, Immigrants, Workers and Consumers

(New York, NY) –The Legal Aid Society today released a [slate](#) of 2021 statewide civil law reform priorities and called on Governor Andrew Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie to enact the ambitious legislative agenda to address income inequality, poverty, homelessness, protect low-income tenants, immigrants, workers and consumers, and restore civil legal services funding, among other urgent issues.

“As the institutional legal services provider in New York City, we serve tens of thousands of low-income New Yorkers—from fighting an eviction in housing court and advocating for individuals experiencing homelessness, to helping New Yorkers get vital, life-sustaining public assistance and standing with vulnerable immigrants and essential workers during COVID-19,” said **Adriene Holder, Attorney-in-Charge of the Civil Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “We see firsthand how the legal safeguards outlined in our legislative agenda would benefit our clients every day and provide critical protections for those who need it most. We urge the Governor and Legislature to act quickly and pass these measures.”

Legal Aid urges the Legislature to take action on the following critical bills and programs:

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

- Restore and increase the Civil Legal Services Allocation in the Legal Services Assistance Fund (LSAF): The economic recovery must not be built on the backs of low-income communities of color who have been disproportionately impacted by the consequences of the pandemic and economic fallout. Civil legal services are an essential part of the recovery.

COVID RESPONSE

- New York Health and Essential Rights Act (NY HERO Act) (Assemblywoman Karines Reyes/State Sen. Michael Gianaris)
- Restoring UI Benefits to Workers Refusing to Work Under Unsafe Conditions (A.10468 Simon/S.8309 Hoylman)
- Extend UI Benefits to Workers with Part-Time Employment (A.446 Stirpe/S.5754 Ramos)
- Generating new tax revenue for a worker relief fund (A.10414 de la Rosa/S.8277 Ramos)
- Rent Relief Package: Rent relief finalized in the December federal stimulus bill – \$25 billion distributed to states, a fraction of the \$100 billion proposed nationally – will not be nearly enough to prevent mass evictions and severe rent liability in New York. New Yorkers will owe close to \$3.5 billion in rent arrears and some 700,000 New Yorkers are at risk of eviction. Meaningful rent relief will be critical to prevent mass homelessness and severe rent liabilities for low-income families.
- Introduce and adopt time-limited changes to preserve and expand access to critical government benefits New Yorkers need to get through the COVID crisis

HOUSING

- Pass new “good cause” eviction legislation to bring renters’ rights to tenants in smaller buildings (A.5050 Hunter/S.2892 Salazar)
- Housing access voucher program (A.9657A Cymbrowitz/S.7628A Kavanagh)
- Funding for Public Housing: Some 600,000 NYCHA tenants are living in untenable conditions. The State needs to fund the capital needs of public housing across the state but especially in New York City.

IMMIGRATION

- Child Trauma Response Act (A.7815B Hevesi/S.6225B Biaggi)

PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Adopt a Critical Rent Subsidy Program - Home Stability Support (A.1620 Hevesi/S.2375 Krueger)
- Provide Diaper Allowance to Help Struggling Families (A.2567B Solages/S.1086 Persaud)
- Strengthen Families – Allow Fair Treatment of a Child’s Unearned Income (A.9064 Hevesi/S.7260 Persaud)

EMPLOYMENT

- The SWEAT bill: Secure compliance with wage laws through wage liens (A.9008 Rosenthal/S.7256 Ramos) This bill would, among other things, create an employee’s lien for employees with wage claims. Gov. Cuomo vetoed a previous iteration of the bill, numbered A.486B/S.2844B, in January 2020. The most recent iteration was reintroduced and passed in the Senate in mid-2020 but has not received a vote in the Assembly.
- Ending forced labor in correctional facilities and extending NYS minimum wage laws to incarcerated workers: (1) The first bill is the Freedom from Forced Labor Act (A.8661 Epstein/S.6781 Myrie), which will amend the state constitution to prohibit the forced labor of people who are incarcerated. (2) The second bill is the Real Wages for All New Yorkers Act, which moves regulation of work performed by incarcerated people out of the Department of Corrections and into the Department of Labor.
- Applying the “ABC” Test to determine whether workers are employees or independent contractors under New York labor law (A.8721A Glick/S.6699A Jackson)

HEALTH

- Medicaid Overpayment Reform: We are awaiting introduction of legislation that would address several of the most egregious aspects of the Medicaid overpayment investigation and collections process in New York State. The proposed legislation would: limit the amount of recovery to the amount that a recipient was over-income or over-resourced if that amount is less than the cost of assistance; require an attestation by a government official at the time of the filing of a complaint or the signing of a settlement agreement that the defendant’s lack of eligibility had been adequately established and documented; establish a two-year grace period for those who become ineligible for Medicaid not because of any change to income or resources, but because their category of Medicaid eligibility changed; among others.

- Look-Back Requirements for Medical Assistance Benefits (A.10489 Gottfried /S.8337 Rivera)
- Eligibility for Home Care Services for Individuals With Cognitive Disabilities (A.10486 Gottfried/S.8403 Rivera)
- Essential Plan Coverage for Individuals Ineligible Because of Immigration Status (S.8357 Gottfried/A.10474 Rivera)
- Automatic Re-enrollment for Medicaid Recipients with Home Care Services (A.9017 Gottfried/S.7523 Rivera)

CONSUMER

- Rates of Interest on Money Judgments (A.10479 Weinstein/S.7946 Thomas)
- Consumer Credit Fairness Act (CCFA) (A.6909 Weinstein/S.4827 Thomas)
- Ban Unfair and Abusive Acts UDAP/GBL 349 Bill (A.679C Niou/S.2407C Comrie)
- Create a Private Right of Action to Enforce Mortgage Servicing Rules (A.10851 Dinowitz/S.8789 Kavanagh)

TAX

- Further amend Tax Law Section 171-v to protect the rights of tax debtors facing a driver's license suspension

FAMILY

- Child Custody Forensic Reports (A.5621 Weinstein/S.4686 Biaggi)
- Child Custody Forensic Reports and Training (A.9888 Dinowitz)

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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