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

### ***Legal Aid Statement in Response to Gov. Cuomo's State of the State Address***

(ALBANY, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society** issued the following statement in response to Governor Cuomo's State of the State address:

“While we welcome the Governor's enthusiasm for marijuana legalization, he must call on the Legislature to pass the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act — the only path to legalization that centers Black and Latinx communities — communities who have been devastated by the war on drugs and ravaged by COVID-19. The MRTA creates clear community reinvestment provisions that dedicate resources to job training, expansion of afterschool programs, education and reentry services — all critical services that are long overdue in communities targeted by the war on drugs.

In addition to legalization, New York must continue to invest in communities by prioritizing and passing urgent reforms that bring critically needed fairness to the parole system; provide protections for Black and Latinx young people against surreptitious DNA collection and invasive police interrogations; end brutally punitive solitary confinement; eliminate predatory court fees; reforming sentencing policy; remove roadblocks to meaningful appellate review; and enact new laws to protect immigrant New Yorkers. In the last election, voters returned a Legislature with a mandate for ambitious criminal justice reform and the Governor must respond to that mandate.

The Legal Aid Society commits to working with the Governor and Legislature leaders to bring these priorities to fruition this session.”

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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](http://www.legalaidnyc.org)*