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

***Legal Aid Statement on Criminalization Bars in the U.S.
Citizenship Act of 2021 and American Dream and Promise Act
of 2021***

(NEW YORK, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society** today released the following statement on the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 and the American Dream and Promise Act of 2021, legislation proposed by the Biden Administration and Congress, which aims to reform the immigration system and create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented people:

“The Legal Aid Society welcomes these efforts from the Biden administration to reform an immigration system that is in desperate need of change and undo the xenophobic policies of the last administration. However, we must be cognizant that these legislative measures, however well-meaning, have harmful provisions that further entangle immigrants in the criminal legal system—inadvertently furthering an anti-immigrant agenda rather than countering it.

For example, both the U.S. Citizenship Act and the American Dream and Promise Act include broad criminalization bars that would strengthen the power of the federal government to deny immigration status based on individuals’ juvenile records, increase the use of technology at the border, and would make some people who have been convicted of misdemeanors--which include petty offenses such as drinking in public, street vending without a license, jaywalking, and damage to property, among others--ineligible for legal status.

The criminalization bars will create even more barriers for immigrants who are already targeted by a racist criminal legal system, and put them at increased risk of detention and deportation. We cannot allow these measures to undermine the bills’ shared objective — a pathway to eventual

citizenship for undocumented people. We urge Congressmembers to remove these harmful criminalization bars from both the U.S. Citizenship Act and the American Dream and Promise Act before voting on these bills next week, and put forth legislation that truly protects *all* immigrants.”

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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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