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Contact:

Redmond Haskins
The Legal Aid Society
929-441-2384
rhaskins@legal-aid.org

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

Legal Aid Statement in Support of the Black Freedom Project's Marijuana Legalization Virtual Advocacy Day

(NEW YORK, NY) – **The Legal Aid Society** issued the following statement in support of the Black Freedom Project's Marijuana Legalization virtual advocacy day:

“The Legal Aid Society was proud to participate in today’s virtual marijuana legalization advocacy day led by the Black Freedom Project. Any final legalization agreement must center Black and Latinx New Yorkers - those who have suffered so much from marijuana prohibition and the racist War on Drugs. As lawmakers continue to negotiate language, we demand that any final proposal:

- contain automatic expungement for past marijuana convictions, necessary to restore communities devastated by the racist and unjust War on Drugs;
- eliminate the ability of police to cite marijuana odor as justification for a stop - other than a stop based on reasonable suspicion for driving under the influence - without which the NYPD will continue to use drug laws to target and harass Black and Latinx New Yorkers;
- increase the legal limit possession thresholds, at least matching the approach of our neighbors in New Jersey by legalizing six ounces;
- treat public consumption of marijuana as a civil infraction under the public health law, not a violation under the penal law which will inevitably lead to New Yorkers’ needless contact with our criminal legal system;
- guarantee an equitable and diverse marijuana industry, including a social equity licensing program on day one, and support for farmers and small businesses over large corporations;
- end the use of marijuana as justification for separating children from their families through the child welfare system.

Albany must deliver justice for the communities that have suffered the devastating and far-reaching consequences of marijuana criminalization by enacting the Marijuana Regulation & Taxation Act, which will fully address the aforementioned concerns, at once.”

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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 145 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