



May 17, 2021

Contact:

Redmond Haskins  
The Legal Aid Society  
[rhaskins@legal-aid.org](mailto:rhaskins@legal-aid.org)  
(929) 441-2384

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

***The Legal Aid Society's 44th Annual Servant of Justice Awards  
Celebrated the Resilience of Staff and BIPOC Communities During a  
Year of Enormous Challenge***

***Event Honored Roger W. Ferguson, Jr. - Former President and CEO  
of TIAA, with Special Guests Wes Moore, Ali Velshi and Performances  
by Daniel Yearwood & Johanna Moise***

**(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society** held its 44th Annual Servant of Justice awards last Thursday, celebrating the work of the organization's staff representing New York's most vulnerable communities on a myriad of issues throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the past year, the staff of The Legal Aid Society has served as legal “frontline responders”, advocating and litigating for low-income communities during a year where COVID-19, police violence and racialized unrest devastated so many.

While these issues have plagued BIPOC communities long before COVID-19, the increased disparity in healthcare, access to needed resources and the isolation of incarceration in jails and prison was life-threatening. Every single day, Legal Aid leads the fight in protecting incarcerated clients in jails, prisons and ICE facilities from COVID-19 exposure; ensuring that families living in shelters have working internet to access remote learning; securing critical protections for

tenants defending against eviction and homelessness; and advancing key juvenile justice issues to benefit young clients.

In addition to celebrating the work of staff, the event honored Roger W. Ferguson, Jr., former President and CEO of The Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America-College Retirement Equities Fund and former Vice Chairman of the Board of Governors for the Federal Reserve System, where he led the Fed's initial response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Ali Velshi, host of "Velshi" on MSNBC served as emcee of the evening's program.

Additional speakers included members Jarrett Payne, a community activist and the lead Plaintiff in a [lawsuit](#) brought by Legal Aid and NYCLU last fall to hold the NYPD accountable for its violent handling of the George Floyd demonstrations; and Wes Moore, CEO of the Robin Hood Foundation - one of the largest anti-poverty organizations in the nation.

To close out the event, Yusef Salaam of the Exonerated Five spoke, and Daniel Yearwood and Johanna Moise, Broadway actors from plays including Hamilton, The Heights and Wicked, performed a mashup of various songs from those shows.

A full recording of the event can be found [here](#).

"Since last March, Legal Aid staff has worked tirelessly to defend our clients on a myriad of fronts where COVID-19 posed a threat," said **Janet Sabel, CEO and Attorney-In-Chief of The Legal Aid Society**. "We've worked to keep families in their homes, freed clients from deplorable jail conditions, and ensured that our young clients in congregate settings have unfettered access to the COVID-19 vaccine. To say the least, the last year has been trying but it has also revealed the indefatigable resilience of both our staff and the New Yorkers we serve."

The event was generously sponsored by over three dozen law firm and business partners including the law firms Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP; Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP; Debevoise & Plimpton LLP; Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP; Kirkland & Ellis LLP; Latham & Watkins LLP; Milbank; Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP; Proskauer Rose LLP; Shearman & Sterling LLP; Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP; Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP; Sullivan & Cromwell LLP; Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz; Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP; White & Case LLP; and Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP.

###

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