

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

Justice in Every Borough.

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

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

Legal Aid Calls on the Administrative Board of the Courts to Reform the Bar Admission Process to Reduce Racial Injustice in the Legal Profession

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society, together with a broad coalition of youth advocacy, reentry and defender organizations, called on the New York Administrative Board of the Courts (the “Administrative Board”) to reform the Bar admission process to bring it into compliance with the law and as a first step towards reducing racial injustice in the legal profession.

In a [letter](#) to the Administrative Board, Legal Aid and other advocates target Question 26 of the Character and Fitness Application to Practice Law in New York State, which violates the New York State Human Rights Law and the Family Court Act by requiring Bar applicants to divulge information about all arrests, including juvenile delinquency arrests and sealed arrests.

Specifically, Question 26 on the Bar application asks:

Have you ever, either as an adult or a juvenile, been cited, ticketed, arrested, taken into custody, charged with, indicted, convicted or tried for, or pleaded guilty to, the commission of any felony or misdemeanor or the violation of any law, or been the subject of any juvenile delinquency or youthful offender proceeding? Traffic violations that occurred more than ten years before the filing of this application need not be reported, except alcohol or drug-related traffic violations, which must be reported in all cases, irrespective of when they occurred. Do not report parking violations.

“Question 26 is bad public policy, has a racially discriminatory impact, and patently violates the law,” said **Dawne Mitchell, Attorney-In-Charge of the Juvenile Rights Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “We strongly urge the Administrative Board to significantly revise the Bar admission process in New York State to advance racial justice and increase diversity in the profession. We believe that the Administrative Board’s first step should be to revise Question 26 so that it complies with the Family Court Act and the Human Rights Law.”

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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