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

## ***Legal Aid Launches Campaign to Educate New Yorkers on their Parole Rights Following Implementation of Less is More Act***

(NEW YORK, NY) - **The Legal Aid Society** today announced the launch of the Less is More Act (LIM) educational campaign to inform New Yorkers of sweeping new parole rights. Under this legislation, New Yorkers in community supervision benefit from some of the most progressive parole policies in the nation. The advertising and community education campaign is The Legal Aid Society's largest public education effort of this scale.

The campaign features Legal Aid client Jhonny Mercedes who was initially released on parole in New Jersey at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. After his release, his living circumstances changed forcing him to make a difficult choice: either reside in a shelter and risk exposure to COVID-19 or move with his family to New York City. As a result of his move, Jhonny lost contact with his parole officer. He failed to report and was sent to Rikers Island for 30 days.

Under the Less Is More Act, technical violations like these no longer result in automatic jail time—reforms that seek to curtail the mass incarceration of Black and Brown New Yorkers. Due to this legislation, Jhonny was released early from Rikers following his reincarceration. Through Earned Time Credits, Jhonny is able to reduce his parole sentence by half. People on parole can cut 30 days off their parole sentence for every 30 days without sustaining a violation. Through Legal Aid's representation, Jhonny received vocational training and is employed with Osborne Association's Janitorial & Maintenance Services team.

"The Less is More Act is a pivotal reform, driven by a movement of impacted people, that restores some dignity and justice to an outdated and punitive carceral system. This law will keep families together and save lives by keeping individuals out of jail so they can continue rebuilding their lives," said **Tina Luongo, Chief Attorney of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal**

**Aid Society.** “While it is a critical step forward, we hope to see it expand to include individuals on life parole and those on parole for other offenses.”

The LIM Act creates a pathway to finish parole early through earned time credits, ends automatic detention and incarceration for certain technical violations, improves due process by establishing the right to counsel at every stage of the parole revocation process, and sets limits on periods of incarceration for technical violations.

The campaign includes a video of Mr. Mercedes discussing how these reforms have inspired new focus on work and his family following his release into community supervision. The second video features Evan McCants-Goldman, a Staff Attorney in The Legal Aid Society’s Parole Revocation Defense Unit. In the video, McCants-Goldman explains the provisions of the new law. Both videos will be distributed through Legal Aid’s social media platforms and through digital advertising.

In addition to these videos, Jhonny’s story is being told in advertising spaces throughout New York City, including in subways, bus shelters, convenience stores, barbershops, laundromats, and on door hangers distributed in NYCHA housing.

## YOUR NEW PAROLE RIGHTS

**“Every 30 days without a violation gives me 30 days off my parole sentence.”**

—Jhonny, like many Legal Aid clients, reduced his parole sentence by half with **Earned Time Credits**

**Parole Reforms in New York include:**

- No jail for some minor types of parole violations.
- If arrested for a parole violation, a right to see a judge and ask to be released.
- Gives anyone accused of a parole violation the right to a lawyer at every parole violation hearing.
- Provides speedy trial rights and in most cases, a hearing in the community instead of at a jail.
- 30 days off your supervision for every 30 days without a parole violation.

For informational purposes only. This does not constitute legal advice. Please contact the Legal Aid Society or your attorney for more details.

**Don't let your past get in the way of your future. Learn more: [legalaidsnyc.org/parolereform](http://legalaidsnyc.org/parolereform)**

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Justice in Every Borough.

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**LOS NUEVOS DERECHOS QUE OFRECE LA LIBERTAD CONDICIONAL**

**“Por cada 30 días sin una infracción, me descuentan otros 30 días de mi sentencia de libertad condicional.”**

—Jhonny, como muchos clientes de Legal Aid, redujo a la mitad su sentencia de la libertad condicional por medio del **Tiempo Acreditado**

Este anuncio solo cumple con el propósito de ofrecer información. No constituye asesoramiento legal. Para más detalles, por favor comuníquese con la Sociedad de Ayuda Legal o con su abogado.

**No permita que su pasado le cause problemas en su futuro. Para más información consulte la página [legalaidsnyc.org/parolereform](http://legalaidsnyc.org/parolereform)**

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Legal Aid’s Community Justice Unit and Parole Revocation Defense Unit will be conducting a series of Know Your Rights info sessions and train-the-trainer events in June. These sessions will take place throughout New York City with over 40 Cure Violence Program [sites](#).

“The Less is More campaign provides a transformative opportunity for people who are on parole to maintain stability, rebuild their lives, and thrive. The Legal Aid Society is leading a critical education effort to inform New Yorkers about these new changes, including limits on sanctions for technical parole violations and higher burdens of proof before individuals can have their parole revoked,” said **Osborne Association President and Chief Executive Officer Archana Jayaram**. “Since the passage of the Less is More Act, our court advocates working alongside Legal Aid lawyers have seen fewer people jailed for technical violations and more people earning good time credits to reduce the length of their parole supervision. We applaud Legal Aid for their work to educate New Yorkers and ensure that as many people as possible avoid needless jail time and its disruption to their personal and professional lives.”

**Jose Saldana, Director of the Release Aging People in Prison Campaign**, said: “The Less is More Act is common sense, reasonable legislation. It is a step in the right direction to correcting the impact of racist policies of mass incarceration that targeted Black and Brown families and communities. This bill will ensure that tens of thousands of New Yorkers will no longer be returned to prison for technical violations that can be effectively addressed without

reincarceration – and without risking permanent loss of employment and housing, and inflicting more family separation.”

**Kenyatta Muzzanni, Director of Organizing with the Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice,** said: “Thanks to the Less Is More Act, tens of thousands of New Yorkers and their families who have been harmed by broken parole practices will instead be given the chance and support they need to succeed. We applaud the Legal Aid Society, a member of the #LessIsMoreNY Coalition, for leading this public education effort to ensure New Yorkers on parole know about their new rights under the Less Is More Act. This transformative reform would not be possible without the tireless work of our members who are impacted by systemic racism, parole, and mass incarceration and the larger #LessIsMoreNY Coalitions consisting of 300+ groups. Thus far, more than 8,000 New Yorkers, including several of our members, have been discharged from parole early allowing them to focus on rebuilding their lives without the stress that comes with being on parole. We’ll continue to build on this success by calling for the savings from this reform to be invested into communities harmed by mass incarceration and parole.”

**Emily NaPier Singletary, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of Unchained,** said: "The Less is More Act has already benefited thousands of people on parole across New York State, reducing the number of people - predominantly Black and Brown - incarcerated for technical violations and serving needlessly long sentences of community supervision. Our communities and our families will be safer and stronger as a result. In our leadership of the #LessIsMoreNY campaign, Unchained is proud to have partnered with the Legal Aid Society in drafting the legislation, urging its adoption, and ensuring its proper implementation. We commend them for launching this comprehensive effort to educate New Yorkers about the new law and look forward to continued collaboration."

**Donna Hylton, President & CEO of A Little Piece of Light,** said: "A Little Piece of Light cheers the Legal Aid's Society's campaign to educate New Yorkers on #LessIsMoreNY, the nation's most transformative parole reform bill. #LessIsMoreNY makes us safer, decreases the likelihood of future incarceration and increases opportunities for economic mobility and personal and communal well-being. We are proud to support this campaign and the Legal Aid Society's continued commitment to ending mass incarceration and criminalization in New York."

## **BACKGROUND:**

The Legal Aid Society stands alone in its knowledge, abilities and commitment to providing the best legal services in New York State parole revocation proceedings. Formed in 1972, Legal Aid’s Parole Revocation Defense Unit (PRDU) became the first dedicated unit in the country to represent clients in parole revocation proceedings. Today, 50 years later, PRDU has a dedicated team of lawyers, paralegals, investigators and social workers, which represent over 6000 people on parole each year with the goal of both shortening their length of incarceration on Rikers Island, and upon release, assisting clients in the community to avoid violations and re-incarceration.

With a staff of fixed and permanent writ legal team, PRDU has had many successes in obtaining early release and elimination of parole for some clients. The Unit's work has also resulted in critical changes in the policies and procedures of the courts in which we practice. For example, in April 2015, the writ team secured a victory in the Court of Appeals that held that legal competency was a Due Process requirement in a parole violation proceeding. This important ruling now allows incompetent individuals accused of parole violations to receive mental health treatment rather than incarceration.

Most recently, Legal Aid played an integral role in advocating for the Less is More Act, working in a large coalition with fellow defenders, advocates, labor unions, affected New Yorkers and others. Over the course of several years, Legal Aid met with elected officials and led a comprehensive media campaign to bring attention to the needed reform and, ultimately, to secure its passage.

Among its many transformative features reforming New York's draconian parole statute, LIM establishes a recognizance hearing for release at the beginning of the process, thereby eliminating mandatory incarceration during the pendency of parole revocation proceedings. The law went into effect on March 1, 2022.

On March 2, Legal Aid [filed](#) a [mass writ of habeas corpus](#) against the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) seeking the release of 91 incarcerated clients who were being held on a parole warrant and one dollar bail, because those clients were denied their rights to a release hearing guaranteed by the new 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 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)*