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

***13th Forward Coalition Calls on Albany Lawmakers to Finally
End Slavery For All Incarcerated New Yorkers on the 157th
Anniversary of the 13th Amendment's Ratification***

***The "No Slavery in NY Act" Would Amend the State
Constitution to Prohibit Forced Labor in Prisons and Jails***

***The "Fairness and Opportunity for Incarcerated Workers Act"
Would Extend Worker Protections to Incarcerated New
Yorkers***

(NEW YORK, NY) — [13th Forward](#), a statewide coalition working to abolish slavery for all New Yorkers and end exploitation in New York's prison labor system, rallied today at Foley Square to launch their 2023 legislative campaign. Advocates called on Albany lawmakers to pass critical legislation that would amend New York's constitution to prohibit forced labor and other forms of modern-day slavery in jails and prisons, and ensure that all incarcerated workers are guaranteed basic rights and safety protections.

[Recording available here.](#)

The [*No Slavery in NY Act*](#) would enshrine in our state constitution the abolition of slavery without exception, including for those convicted of crimes. The current lack of state constitutional protection has allowed New York to build a prison system so dependent on human exploitation and degradation that it is akin to modern-day slavery. Its companion legislation, the [*Fairness and Opportunity For Incarcerated Workers Act*](#) would ensure that all workers in New York, including those who are incarcerated, receive basic labor protections, a fair wage, and be protected against forced labor by threat of punishment.

Advocates gathered on the 157th anniversary of the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which ended chattel slavery but included an insidious exception: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime... shall exist within the United States.”

Incarcerated New Yorkers face brutal workplace conditions where they are routinely deprived of basic safety protections and are punished for refusing to work. The penalties are so harsh – solitary confinement, losing visitation time with family or time outside – that the option to work isn’t an option at all. Additionally, incarcerated New Yorkers staff hundreds of jobs, from prison maintenance to the manufacturing of our street signs and public school desks, and are paid just pennies per hour for their labor.

Recently, [Alabama](#), [Tennessee](#), [Vermont](#), and [Oregon](#) passed historic abolition amendments, officially closing the prison slavery loophole in their constitutions nearly 160 years after the ratification of the 13th Amendment. They join [Utah](#), [Colorado](#), and [Nebraska](#) to have made this change since 2018.

"I am proud to be introducing *The No Slavery in NY Act* and *The Fairness & Opportunities for Incarcerated New Yorkers Act* in the upcoming legislative session and am grateful for the support of the 13th Forward coalition. From Utah to Alabama, states across our nation have proven that we can address the ugly legacy of slavery in our state constitutions and prison systems. Simply put, liberty and opportunity are New York values. It is time for us to guarantee the freedom from forced labor for all New Yorkers and to extend basic workers' rights to incarcerated workers. All New Yorkers deserve dignity and respect. Let's get this done," said **New York State Senator Zellnor Myrie (D-20)**.

“It’s an honor to be introducing the *No Slavery in New York Act* with Senator Myrie and the 13th Forward Coalition. One hundred and fifty seven years ago the 13th amendment to the constitution was ratified on this day, abolishing slavery in a majority of the states. However, one pernicious exception to abolition has persisted for over a century and a half, allowing for slavery and involuntary servitude for prison labor. Today, states are acting to amend their own constitutions to end slavery and guarantee freedom from forced labor under any circumstances, once and for all. In New York, we must do the same,” said **New York Assemblymember Harvey Epstein (D-74)**.

“The modern-day slavery exception is a stain on New York’s history, and Albany has an opportunity to end our 200 year history of exploitation and dehumanization in our prison system,” said **Jacalyn Goldzweig, paralegal casehandler in the Employment Law Unit at**

The Legal Aid Society. “A system that relies on forced labor and denies workers fair wages and basic rights should not exist, period. We call on lawmakers and Governor Hochul to pass the No Slavery in NY Act and Fairness and Opportunity for Incarcerated Workers Act in the next session.”

“Today our state continues to force people to work under threat of punishment like solitary confinement, delayed parole and loss of family visitation privileges. We pay pennies to incarcerated workers while churning out goods for profit, including hand sanitizer and PPE that was withheld from these very individuals themselves as COVID tore through carceral settings across the state. It is time for New York to create a prison labor system that ends these forced and exploitative practices, provides basic labor protections for workers, increases wages, and creates meaningful pathways to employment for individuals impacted by our criminal legal system,” said **Lisa Zucker, NYCLU Senior Attorney for Legislative Affairs.**

"I worked for Corcraft for 10 years, building the very chairs that our legislators in Albany sit on as they write our laws. I knew that if I refused to work, I would be punished harshly - though the most I ever made was 45 cents an hour for backbreaking labor. If that's not slavery, what is?" said **Wilfredo Laracuate, 13th Forward Campaign Leader, Educator, and Formerly Incarcerated Advocate.**

“Because it is so difficult to survive in there and commissary is so expensive, the guards take advantage of that and create an environment where they are in control. They might give us little presents, little pieces of home that we are desperate for. And then they expect something in return, and that’s when the sexual assault and abuse happens. It makes you feel like you’re in a bind. Who wouldn’t feel that pressure making 10 cents an hour?” **Shirley “Jazzy” Mason, Community Leader with A Little Piece of Light**

“When I was incarcerated I refused to work for Corcraft, because I did not want the state to benefit from my labor and get nothing in return. The practice of using forced labor in this state is legalized slavery, and Black & Brown communities are the ones suffering from this policy. What’s more, in my 49 years of incarceration I saw occupational training programs come and go. The current programs are not what they used to be. We need programming that translates to real job opportunities on the outside. There are many ways to go about this, like working with trade unions to have a pathway to employment with them upon release. Do we want to set people up for success once they return home? Then we must transform the current system,” said **Jalil Muntaqim, Special Projects Coordinator with Citizen Action of NY.**

“Even though we are incarcerated, we are supposed to be in these prisons for correction, not to be used for slave labor. We are fathers, sons, brothers, and most of all humans.... Many of us left kids outside these wall[s] and want to do for them but how can you be making \$6 every two weeks! What part of correction is this?,” said **MF, currently incarcerated New Yorker.**

“I have been incarcerated for three decades and held several job assignments in multiple facilities. The pay for these jobs was about 16 cents an hour, often working five days a week for an 6-8 hour shift, and sometimes working seven days a week with no [extra] pay....It's a slave to

master kind of relationship/treatment with most staff,” said **CJ, currently incarcerated New Yorker.**

“They use violence as sort of like a tool... That’s why I feel like it is slavery. Because they will beat one person to let everybody know that you could be next... You live with that — with that in your mind every day, like you could be next,” said **Zach, formerly incarcerated New Yorker.**

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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 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.

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