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

Legal Aid Statement in Response to Governor Kathy Hochul's State of the State Address

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society released the following statement in response to Governor Hochul's State of the State address:

“While we are heartened that Governor Kathy Hochul plans to prioritize statewide affordable housing construction, tenants need relief now. ‘[Good Cause](#)’ eviction legislation, along with the [Housing Access Voucher Program](#), are two initiatives that would keep families, the majority of whom are from Black and Latinx neighborhoods, safely housed, off the street and out of the already burgeoning local shelter system.

“The Governor’s announcement of critical and necessary investments into substance and mental health treatment, gun violence prevention and alternatives to incarceration is welcome, but her call to eliminate a requirement that pretrial incarceration for bail-eligible charges be the ‘least restrictive’ option accomplishes nothing of value and is in tension with [well-established United States Supreme Court precedent](#) protecting the presumption of innocence. As legislative leaders [have noted](#), continuing to falsely scapegoat bail reform only distracts from community investments and reforms like the [Treatment Not Jails Act](#) and [Clean Slate](#).

“Moreover, her funding proposal for District Attorneys to hire additional prosecutors ignores the immense needs of public defender organizations, which share the same staffing, operational and financial needs. New York City public defense funding has been flat for years despite rapidly escalating operational costs - including rent, healthcare and collectively bargained salary increases - that prosecutors cover through other funding sources.

“Funding one side of the justice system without equal or greater investment in public defense addresses at best half the problem and exacerbates the deeply rooted inequalities at the root of the criminal legal system.

“Lastly, in the decades since the Exonerated Five were coerced into providing false confessions, New York has failed to act to protect youth. Science establishes that youth do not fully comprehend the long-term consequences of their actions and falsely confess at higher rates than adults. This is why Albany must sign into law [#RightToRemainSilent](#) legislation so our young clients - like those from families able to afford a private attorney - have access to counsel prior to a custodial police interrogation.

“For New York to live up to its purported progressive ideals, Governor Hochul and the Legislature must prioritize forward thinking measures over the failed policies of the past to better serve our most vulnerable neighbors. The Legal Aid Society looks forward to working with lawmakers to attain this goal in the coming days, weeks and months.”

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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. <https://www.legalaidnyc.org>