



January 26, 2023

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

Legal Aid Society Statement on Mayor Eric Adams' State of the City Address

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society released the following statement in response to Mayor Eric Adams' State of the City address:

“In 2019, Albany finally overhauled New York’s outmoded and punitive discovery statute which eroded due process, coerced the accused into forced pleas and contributed to wrongful convictions. This reform was badly needed, but the legislation was not supported by funding to address the associated technological and staffing demands. While the City provided public defenders a small allocation to assist with implementation, it wasn’t nearly enough, and Albany failed to appropriate resources as well.

“Today’s announcement from Mayor Eric Adams of a proposed funding allocation to assist our organization with discovery obligations is welcome news, and we laud the Mayor for this action, but we categorically reject any changes to the current discovery law - rollbacks City Hall and other lawmakers will likely push for this legislative session.

“But our funding needs stretch well beyond this single issue. From the first days Eric Adams assumed the mayoralty, we have communicated with him and his staff regularly about the dire situation our organization, along with fellow defender and civil legal services providers, face as a result of years of flat funding and ever-increasing required expenses.

“Our work providing essential legal assistance in a myriad of courts is either constitutionally or legally mandated. Put another way, we have an obligation to administer our services, an obligation enshrined by the United States Constitution or the City’s legal mandates, and the City has a responsibility to ensure unfettered access to our services for low-income New Yorkers.

“We are at a breaking point, hemorrhaging staff at an unprecedented level, increasingly incapable of attracting prospective employees because the salaries we offer cannot meet New York City’s skyrocketing cost of living or allow recent graduates to repay their student loan debt. Our rent, healthcare, collectively bargained salary increases and other escalating operational needs - costs that District Attorney offices cover through other funding sources - compound this crisis.

“Mayor Adams frequently references the need for a fully functioning legal system, and we are very much a part of that system, representing some of New York City’s most vulnerable residents. For the wheels of justice to turn, *all of our needs* must be met, and we hope this is just the beginning of a conversation that will ultimately end with significant baselined increases, preserving our legal services for the literally hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who seek our assistance annually.”

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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