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Press Contacts:

Alejandra Lopez, The Legal Aid Society, [ailopez@legal-aid.org](mailto:ailopez@legal-aid.org)  
Arianna Fishman, New York Civil Liberties Union, [afishman@nyclu.org](mailto:afishman@nyclu.org)  
Jocelyn Walker, [media@colorofchange.org](mailto:media@colorofchange.org)  
[13thForwardNY@gmail.com](mailto:13thForwardNY@gmail.com)

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

***Electeds, 13th Forward Coalition, and Nearly 100 New Yorkers Call on Legislature to Finally End Modern-Day Slavery For Incarcerated New Yorkers during Advocacy Day in Albany***

(ALBANY, NY) — Nearly 100 New Yorkers, including elected officials and advocates with [13th Forward](#), a statewide coalition working to abolish slavery for all New Yorkers and end exploitation in New York’s prison labor system, rallied on the Million Dollar Staircase today to celebrate Black History Month and called on lawmakers to pass legislation that would finally end slavery for all incarcerated New Yorkers.

[Recording available here.](#)

The 13th Forward legislation includes the [No Slavery in NY Act](#), which would amend the state constitution to abolish slavery without exception, and the [Fairness and Opportunity For Incarcerated Workers Act](#), which 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.

Activists executed a sticker campaign, pasting stickers on the countless items that are used throughout the State Capitol building and are made by incarcerated New Yorkers, including desks, office chairs, name plates, soap and hand sanitizer dispensers, shelving, and more.

Pastor Angela Lockett with Forefront Church Brooklyn led the Civil Rights hymn “We Shall Overcome,” and an art piece by incarcerated artist Lamar Little was showcased.

"Our laws and state constitution should reflect the dignity of all New Yorkers, including those who are incarcerated. I am proud to lead the fight for basic protections and an end to forced labor for incarcerated people, and look forward to ending the practice of modern-day slavery in our state," said **State Senator Zellnor Myrie (D-20)**.

"I am proud to stand with Senator Myrie and the 13th Forward Coalition in support of *The No Slavery in NY Act* and *The Fairness & Opportunities for Incarcerated New Yorkers Act*. One hundred and fifty seven years ago the 13th amendment to the constitution was ratified, 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. All New Yorkers deserve dignity and respect," said **New York Assemblymember Harvey Epstein (D-74)**.

"Those who fought to abolish slavery through the 13th Amendment would be turning over in their graves if they saw the forced prison labor that's occurring in our penitentiary system today," said State Assemblymember Juan Ardila. "If incarcerated individuals - who are disproportionately black and brown - choose not to work for as little as ten cents an hour, they could lose family visitation rights, good time credits and in some cases face solitary confinement. This is the definition of cruel and unusual punishment, and must end immediately," said **Assemblymember Juan Ardila (D-37)**.

"The 13th Amendment is a stain on our nation. The fact that New York still allows for the slave labor of its incarcerated population, which is predominantly Black and Brown, is a disgrace. It's past-time we end these exploitative practices and pass the No Slavery NY and Fairness & Opportunities for Incarcerated Workers Acts," said **Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas (D-34)**.

"Albany has an opportunity to end a 200 year history of exploitation and dehumanization in our prison system," said **Twyla Carter, attorney-in-charge of 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 13th Forward legislation at once."

"Ending the exception for slavery in our state constitution is much more than a symbolic act. I've experienced firsthand the forced labor system inside New York State prisons. Refusing a work assignment isn't an option when corrections officers have total control over your life. Big corporations are profiting off this forced labor, paying as little as 16 cents per hour. Meanwhile the high costs of incarceration--from phone calls to toiletries--put an economic strain on families. Ending the exception and raising wages for those workers would be a win for families, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color," said **Rosemary Rivera, Co-Executive Director, Citizen Action of NY**.

"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 Laracunte, 13<sup>th</sup> Forward Campaign Leader, Educator, and Formerly Incarcerated Advocate.**

"The 13<sup>th</sup> Forward bills would improve community safety, economic fairness, and reentry outcomes across our state. When I sing Civil Rights hymns like We Shall Overcome, I am reminded of the strength of this movement and the opportunity of this moment. This year, we must finally end slavery as punishment for a crime and affirm in our constitution that all New Yorkers deserve dignity and respect. Let's get this done," said **Donna Hylton, CEO of A Little Piece of Light.**

"New York state continues to force incarcerated people to work under threat of punishment like solitary confinement, delayed parole and loss of family visitation privileges. Our state pays pennies to incarcerated workers while churning out their goods for profit, including the very hand sanitizer and PPE that was withheld from these individuals throughout the pandemic. New York must end these forced and exploitative practices, provide basic labor protections for workers, increase wages, and create meaningful pathways to employment for individuals impacted by our criminal legal system. The time for the No Slavery in NY Act and the Fairness and Opportunity for Incarcerated Workers Act is now," said **Lisa Zucker, NYCLU Senior Attorney for Legislative Affairs.**

"More than 150 years after slavery was abolished, state-sanctioned exploitation continues in New York's prison system," said **Michael Collins, Senior Director of Government Affairs at Color Of Change.** "Make no mistake — prisons profiting off of forced labor from incarcerated individuals is a form of modern day slavery. We call on New York State lawmakers to immediately pass the *No Slavery in NY Act* and the *Fairness and Opportunity for Incarcerated Workers Act* — critical legislation that would finally abolish slavery without exception and provide long-needed protections to workers who are incarcerated. These changes can't wait."

"We're proud to join in solidarity with the 13th Forward coalition to demand justice for incarcerated workers. Not only do such workers do essential labor behind bars for pennies on the dollar, but they're also denied any access to the safety net upon their release, even while facing significant barriers to securing a job. We are committed to ending these injustices and winning the Unemployment Bridge Program, which will finally give formerly incarcerated workers access to a financial lifeline on their path to full employment," said **Emma Kryche, Worker Justice Center Of New York with the Fund Excluded Workers Coalition.**

"Even though we are incarcerated, we are supposed to be in these prisons for correction, not to be used for slave labor. We are father's, son's, brother's, and most of all human's [sic].... 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....Its a slave to master kind of relationship/treatment with most staff,” said **CJ, currently incarcerated New Yorker.**

“They use violence as 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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