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

Attorneys for Children Providers Call on Governor Hochul, NYS Legislature for Increased Funding in the FY2024 Budget

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society, Lawyers For Children, The Children’s Law Center, Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo, Legal Aid Society of Suffolk County, Children’s Rights Society, Citizens Concerned for Children, Legal Aid Society of Rochester, Legal Aid Society of Rockland County, and Sullivan Trail Legal Society, released the following statement in response to Governor Kathy Hochul’s Fiscal Year 2024 Executive proposal and the New York State Legislature’s one-house budget bills which failed to include increased funding for Attorneys for Children offices across the state that are appointed to represent children who are the subject of abuse, neglect, delinquency and custody proceedings in Family Court:

“We are deeply disappointed that Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature failed to include \$15 million in increased funding for Attorneys for Children (“AFC”) legal services offices. Twenty years of near flat funding and recent funding cuts have resulted in stunning attrition, difficulty recruiting new staff and crushing workloads for the staff that remain. We call on Governor Hochul and the Legislature to protect children’s rights and equal access to justice for the predominantly Black and Latinx families who rely on the Family Courts, by adequately funding the AFC offices that fight for their right to a safe, stable, and loving home.”

“The thousands of infants, children, youth, and young adults who we represent rely on their attorneys, social workers, youth advocates, paralegals, and administrative staff necessary to provide the holistic representation required to lift their voices and advocate for their rights in life-altering legal proceedings.”

“These are traumatized children, some of whom are wrongly removed from their families due to systemic bias, poverty and housing instability, youth languishing in foster care, teens [orphaned by COVID](#), young people at risk of homelessness when they age out of foster care, toddler separated from parents who desperately want to reunite, and undocumented victims of child sex trafficking, all of whom need the tireless advocacy of AFC offices in order to safely grow and thrive.”

“While we applaud increased funding for public defenders, parents’ attorneys, and AFC 18b panel attorneys, ignoring the need for increased funding for the AFC offices that provide direct legal services to 90 percent of the children in the cities and counties in which they operate will exacerbate the denial of access to justice.”

“Moreover, denial of the high quality legal services offered by AFC offices will perpetuate the ‘second-class system of justice for people of color in New York State’ documented in the [report](#) by Secretary Jeh Johnson and in the recent [report](#) by the Williams Commission”.

“The state is courting disaster by turning a blind eye to the unjustifiable lack of funds that is causing the continued loss of children’s lawyers, the dangerously high caseloads that result, and the impact this has on the protection of children’s rights. Budgets reflect values, and we know that the Governor and the Legislature care about the children we serve. We are asking them to do right by them and provide children with the high-quality, interdisciplinary legal representation they desperately need and unequivocally deserve.”

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