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

The Legal Aid Society Attorneys Publish Article in Columbia Law Review Forum Calling for a Reduction in Family Separations

(NEW YORK, NY) - Two attorneys from The Legal Aid Society published an [article](#) today in The Columbia Law Review Forum entitled *Reducing Family Separations in New York City: The Covid-19 Experiment and a Call for Change*.

The article, written by Melissa Friedman, the Director of Child Welfare Training at the Juvenile Rights Practice, and Daniella Rohr, a Staff Attorney who has represented youth in both the Juvenile Rights Practice and Immigration Law Unit, uses New York City Administration for Children's Services' (ACS) own statistics from the COVID-19 pandemic to demonstrate that in New York City, far too many children are removed from their families.

The abstract reads as follows:

Child welfare agencies and family courts have long removed children from allegedly abusive or neglectful parents as an ultimate means of ensuring a child's safety. The theory that high numbers of removals are necessary to keep children safe, however, had never been tested - there was no mechanism or political will to do so until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

With the near-complete shutdown of New York City, the child welfare apparatus had no choice but to remove fewer children from their homes. Catastrophe for the safety of the City's children did not ensue. Rather, the numbers tell a different story. Children remained safe across a range of metrics, avoided the trauma of removal from their homes during a global pandemic, and experienced sustained safety as the city began to reopen.

The article argues that New York's child welfare system must learn from the COVID-19 experiment and significantly curtail its practice of removing children from their families, which can cause substantial, often irreparable trauma to children. It uses the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study to demonstrate the safety and soundness of reserving removals (also known as remands) for only the most extreme circumstances.

The article focuses on the dramatic reduction of removals specifically during the pandemic; examines the traumatic, racially biased, and overused practice of family separation from a child's perspective; and calls for specific reforms within the existing system to reduce removals while protecting children's safety.

“The pandemic dispelled the longstanding assumption that in many cases, removing children from their home was necessary to keep them safe. We have long known that removals cause unspeakable and often irreversible trauma to children, and now we have the numbers to show removals are often unnecessary,” said **Melissa Friedman, Director of Child Welfare Training with the Juvenile Rights Practice at The Legal Aid Society.**

“The pandemic revealed that children were just as safe—if not safer—when rates of removal were at their lowest. We call on ACS, judges, and the entire child welfare apparatus to take urgent note of this reality, reexamine its over-reliance on removals, and dramatically reduce its use of this traumatic practice,” said **Daniella Rohr, Staff Attorney at The Legal Aid Society.**

The article was drafted by Melissa Friedman and Daniella Rohr in their individual capacities, funded by the Skadden Foundation, and with the support of The Legal Aid Society.

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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. www.legalaidnyc.org