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Contact:

Alejandra Lopez, The Legal Aid Society, ailopez@legal-aid.org

Alex Dery Snider, Empire Justice Center, aderysnider@empirejustice.org

Nadia Khasawneh, New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), nkhasawneh@nylag.org

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

Legal Aid, Empire Justice, NYLAG Launch “Fair Hearing Help NY”

New Website Offers Free Legal Resources for New Yorkers Navigating Government Benefit Hearings

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society, Empire Justice Center, and New York Legal Assistance Group, in partnership with Columbia Law School’s Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic, have launched [Fair Hearing Help NY](#), a free, virtual legal resource for New Yorkers who are representing themselves at an administrative hearing with the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). When an individual's benefits -- such as SNAP benefits -- are reduced, discontinued, or their application is denied, they can request a Fair Hearing. A Fair Hearing allows the individual to make their case and the agency will review the decision. However, this is a legal process, and it can be intimidating for many individuals.

According to OTDA’s Annual Report, 155,662 hearings were requested in New York State in 2022 (123,990 in New York City alone). Ninety-seven percent of Appellants are not represented by counsel.

The new website will help New Yorkers who are representing themselves in a Fair Hearing navigate the complex process of administrative hearings and offer information that will allow them to more fully participate in their Fair Hearings and exercise their due process rights.

“We are proud to launch Fair Hearing Help NY with our partners to help thousands of low-income New Yorkers maintain the life-sustaining benefits to which they are entitled,” said

Anne Callagy, citywide director of the Government Benefits Practice at The Legal Aid Society. “When a family’s benefits are wrongfully reduced or terminated, they are forced to make impossible decisions, like whether to put food on the table or pay rent. The new website will equip New Yorkers with the tools to help them keep their benefits.”

“For New Yorkers representing themselves in Fair Hearings, having access to the information and resources that will allow them to fight for their benefits is essential,” said **Marta Mychak, coordinating attorney in the Public Benefits Unit at New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG).** “Fair Hearing Help NY will help to level the playing field during these hearings so that more New Yorkers can keep their benefits to feed their children, stay in their homes, and more. We are thrilled to launch this website to empower more New Yorkers with tools they need to assert their rights.”

“Fair hearings are the only recourse for New Yorkers whose benefits have been unfairly reduced or denied,” said **Susan Antos, Managing Attorney of the Benefits practice at Empire Justice Center.** “However, Fair Hearings are fundamentally a legal process. The new Fair Hearing Help NY website will walk people through the process so they understand the procedural rules and are more likely to be successful. This will mean the difference between people being able to access basic necessities – like food for their families, shelter, access to medical care – or not.”

Individuals can [request a hearing online](#), by mail, by telephone or by fax, and once a hearing is scheduled, they will be able to explain why they think a decision about their case made by a local social services agency is wrong. OTDA will then issue a written decision which will state whether the local agency's decision was right or wrong. The written decision may order the local agency to reverse its prior determination, and restore an individual’s benefits.

Fair Hearing Help NY can be accessed at <http://fairhearinghelpny.org/>

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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

Founded in 1990, New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) is a leading civil legal services organization combating economic, racial, and social injustice by advocating for people experiencing poverty or in crisis. NYLAG exists because wealth should not determine who achieves justice. Our services impacted the lives of 113,000 people last year. www.nylag.org

*Empire Justice Center is a statewide nonprofit law firm whose mission is to make the law work for all New Yorkers, particularly for those who need its protection most. We take a 360-degree, comprehensive approach to changing systems by engaging in three major and interconnected areas of service. We **teach the law** by providing training, support and technical assistance to legal services and other community-based organizations; we **practice the law** by providing*

*direct, civil legal assistance to low-income people with a particular focus on those from marginalized communities; and we **change the law** by engaging in policy analysis, research and advocacy and undertaking impact litigation to get at the root of systemic issues.*