



October 27, 2023

Contact:

Redmond Haskins
Director of Media Relations
The Legal Aid Society
929.441.2384
rhaskins@legal-aid.org

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

Legal Aid Secures Ruling Requiring the NYPD to Disclose Special Expense “SPEX” Budget Contracts

NYPD’s “SPEX” Budget Includes Contracts with Various Vendors Relating to Surveillance Technologies Unknown to the General Public

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society’s [Article 78 petition](#) seeking Special Expense (SPEX) budget contracts from the New York City Police Department (NYPD) was [granted](#) by a New York Supreme Court Justice

The “SPEX” contracts were entered into by the NYPD with certain vendors for surveillance and technology products and services with the consent of numerous other city agencies and offices from 2007-2020. The contracts were kept "offline" and never disclosed to the public. The agencies and offices involved in the agreement to shield the contracts from public view included the Office of the Comptroller, the New York City Law Department, the Mayor's Office of Contract Services, Department of Investigation, and the Office of Management and Budget. The agreement was terminated in 2020 after the passage of the Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology (POST) Act.

“For over a decade, the NYPD hid the purchase and use of powerful surveillance technologies from legislative and public oversight,” said **Benjamin Burger, a Staff Attorney in The Legal Aid Society’s Digital Forensics Unit**. “Given the Adams Administration’s increasing reliance on these policing technologies, it’s critical for all New Yorkers to know how they’re tax dollars are being spent.”

The ruling follows a refusal by the NYPD to grant access to documents requested by Legal Aid through New York’s Freedom of Information Law (“FOIL”). Legal Aid submitted its initial FOIL request on October 29, 2020, requesting “any and all documents” relating to NYPD’s “special expense purchase contracts, for the time period of March 27, 2007 to October 27, 2020.”

The request included purchase contracts and records of payments, among other documents. The FOIL request was denied on March 16, 2021, and the administrative appeal was denied in April. The NYPD claimed that complying with the FOIL request would be unduly burdensome. This argument was specifically rejected by

Justice Lyle E. Frank, who determined the SPEX contracts were of “public importance” and “the very information FOIL intended to give the public access to”

Despite the passage of the Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology (POST) Act, the NYPD’s history of opaqueness surrounding its surveillance capabilities and funding continues.

Legal Aid submitted its FOIL request to bring transparency and greater public understanding to the murky landscape of electronic surveillance technologies that the NYPD has disproportionately used against Black and brown communities, as well as to shine a light on how the NYPD spends its vast budget.

###

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