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

***With the National Pause on Student Loans Now Lifted, Legal Aid and ALAA Call on Albany to Pass Needed Legislation to Increase Aid for Attorneys Servings the Public Interest to Meet Payments***

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society and the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys - UAW Local 2325, in response to the national pause on student loan payments now [lifted](#) after more than three years, called on Governor Kathy Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Carl Heastie to pass legislation that would bolster the New York District Attorney and Indigent Legal Services Attorney Loan Forgiveness Program (DALF), administered by the New York State Higher Educations Services Corporation.

Under the current program, lawyers serving the public interest can receive up to \$3,400 per year, and up to a total of \$20,400 over six years, putting them well behind the award amounts allotted for [registered nurses on teaching faculties](#) and [social workers](#), who perform vital work but, on average, carry less debt than public interest lawyers.

Pending legislation, carried by State Senator Jessica Ramos and Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon, would increase aid up to \$8,000 annually, for up to eight years, or total award eligibility of up to \$64,000 in total.

Last year, the Senate included this legislation in their one-house budget, and the bill passed the full Senate in June with only one member voting in opposition.

New York City is currently in the midst of the worst [affordability crisis](#) of the last two decades, with half of the city's households struggling to pay rent, access sufficient food and basic health care, and afford transportation. Skyrocketing post-pandemic [inflation rates](#) and [rent prices](#) have also contributed to widespread attrition among public defender and civil legal services organizations, with attorneys being forced to seek higher salaries in the private sector in order to pay their mounting bills. If this trend continues, low-income New Yorkers who rely on these providers will be further marginalized and disconnected from critical legal representation.

“Attorneys serving the public interest play a vital role in our legal system, ensuring that low-income New Yorkers have the zealous representation that they need and deserve,” said **Twyla Carter, Attorney-In-Chief and Chief Executive Officer of The Legal Aid Society**. “But with the return of student loan payments, coupled with New York’s skyrocketing cost of living, rent, and inflation, our inability to compensate staff a wage commensurate with the market, each day, more are leaving the profession entirely. This harms the people we represent, causes case delays and hinders true access to justice. Increasing student loan assistance could ease this burden, and we call Albany to enact this legislation immediately next session.”

“Lawmakers must prioritize legislation to bolster student loan assistance. Many ALAA members and other lawyers serving the public interest come from the very communities they seek to serve, but the high cost of law school and low pay in the non-profit and government sectors makes this career choice increasingly more difficult to sustain,” said **Lisa Ohta, President of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys - UAW Local 2325**. “This upcoming session, Albany has a real opportunity to support their own constituents by ensuring experienced lawyers who are dedicated to serving the public are able to afford to stay in their jobs.”

“The return of student loan payments is going to compound existing crises for my constituents. Already the pressure of the high cost of living in NYC results in intense pressure on public defenders. They are trying to protect a constitutional right to representation, to meet the needs of housing defense, immigration work, and defense we are all entitled to while trying to stay on top of their own bills. New Yorkers are better served by attorneys who do not have to pick up Uber Eats shifts between clients. We passed this initiative in the Senate last year, it has to be a priority in the upcoming budget cycle,” said **State Senator Jessica Ramos, Chair of the Senate Labor Committee**.

**Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon** said, “Public interest attorneys work relentlessly to ensure that lower-income New Yorkers receive timely and effective legal representation. However, too many have been compelled to leave jobs they love in order to earn better incomes so they can keep up their student loan payments and the rising cost of living. New York is losing district attorneys and legal services lawyers to the better-paying private sector at alarming rates, and we must act quickly now that student loan payments are kicking in again.” She continued, “Expanding the student loan forgiveness program is one way we can protect the public’s interest and maintain the staff of legal professionals we rely on to perform these critical services.”

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