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Contact:

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

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Advocates Call on NYC Council to Pass the Fair Chance for Housing Act, Ahead of Stated Meeting

Bill Would Ensure Hundreds of Thousands of New Yorkers with Past Convictions Access Housing Opportunities to Keep Our Communities Safer

(NEW YORK, NY) – The **Fair Chance for Housing Coalition** – including The Legal Aid Society, Community Voices Heard, The Fortune Society, Osborne Association, Freedom Agenda of the Urban Justice Center, Mental Health Project of the Urban Justice Center, Brooklyn Defenders Services, Women’s Community Justice Association, and Visionary V Ministries – call on the New York City Council to pass the Fair Chance for Housing Act (Intro 632-A) on December 20th, during the Council’s [Stated Meeting](#).

The Fair Chance for Housing Act would prohibit housing discrimination against New Yorkers with convictions and allow them a second chance after they’ve served their time by prohibiting landlords and brokers from discriminating based on conviction history outside of the “look back window” of 5 years for felonies and 3 years for misdemeanors. This will accelerate their reintegration into society and put them on a path towards the stability that reduces their likelihood of further system involvement and increases safety for all New Yorkers.

While housing providers may still request a criminal background check, they can only do so after they have pre-qualified a potential tenant based on finances, income, and other factors relevant to their ability to be a good tenant. By putting the background check at the end of the screening

process, applicants with a conviction history who have done their time will have a stronger shot at securing housing.

The Fair Chance for Housing Coalition stated:

“Housing is the foundation for employment, physical and mental health, and family well-being. Yet, people with convictions - who are disproportionately Black and brown - and their families, face a lifetime of obstacles to housing. Passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act is a matter of racial justice and family justice. Housing discrimination should not be a part of a person's sentence. We have to allow people access to stable housing so they can move on with their lives and contribute to their communities and the economy. By removing barriers to housing, people are better able to support themselves and their families and make our communities safer. We call on the New York City Council to stand with New Yorkers with past convictions, who have served their sentences, and deserve the same housing rights as all tenants across this City, and pass the Fair Chance for Housing Act.”

BACKGROUND:

In New York City, nearly 750,000 residents have a conviction record – that’s nearly 11 percent of the adult population. Due to long-standing inequities in our criminal legal system, 80 percent of the 750,000 people with convictions are Black or Latinx, even though they make up less than 30 percent of the population. This means that Black and brown people, and their families, are disproportionately impacted by housing discrimination against people with convictions.

Many New Yorkers with conviction histories are parents. Denying someone housing doesn’t just impact that individual, it impacts their family, too, and it creates intergenerational cycles of instability. One survey found that 79 percent of formerly incarcerated individuals and their families experienced housing discrimination.

The Fair Chance for Housing Act, which would be enforced by the City Commission on Human Rights, would cover any person having the right to sell, rent, or lease or approve the sale, rental, or lease of a housing accommodation.

States, cities, and localities such as Cook County, Detroit, New Jersey, and Washington, DC have implemented similar legislation.

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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