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

## *Legal Aid Responds to Governor Hochul's 2024 State of the State Address*

(NEW YORK, NY) - **The Legal Aid Society** issued the following statement in response to Governor Kathy Hochul's 2024 State of the State address:

"Housing is by far the biggest issue facing our state, and lawmakers cannot let another session pass without enacting reforms to equip New Yorkers with basic tenant protections, such as 'Good Cause' and the Housing Access Voucher Program, to ensure that families facing or on the brink of homelessness have the means to secure safe, long-term and affordable housing. We also must work to preserve our existing affordable housing stock, which diminishes each year, forcing low-income New Yorkers from their homes and communities.

"To date, Albany has failed to meaningfully aid the City with its legal and moral obligation to provide shelter to all who seek it. With more new arrivals coming to New York daily, lawmakers must appropriate the funds and resources needed for the Adams Administration to meet this moment and safeguard our clients' safety and well-being.

"On mental health, we welcome Governor Hochul's proposal to create new Mental Health Courts. We encourage her to adopt the [Treatment Not Jail Act](#) model for these courts and to also prioritize increased and new funding streams for community-based treatment providers so communities have resources that will stem the involvement of police and courts. We applaud her proposed investments to increase transitional and specialized housing as well as her investment for Intensive FACT teams, all of which are essential supports. It is precisely these kinds of investments in [shelter](#) and healthcare that increase community safety.

"Building on the enactment of the Clean Slate Act and in addition to the above, we call on Governor Hochul and the Legislature to codify the [Second Look Act](#), which would allow judges to review and reconsider excessive sentences, the [Jury of Our Peers Act](#) to repeal New York's lifetime categorical ban on people with felony convictions from serving on juries; and the [No Slavery in NY Act](#) to abolish the prison labor exception that allows for modern-day slavery for people incarcerated in New York's prisons and jails.

"On juvenile justice, we urge Albany to pass and enact [#Right2RemainSilent](#) legislation to ensure that all youth under the age of 18 have access to an attorney prior to a police interrogation, the [Juvenile CARE Act](#) to preserve the confidentiality of juvenile delinquency records and enhance expungement provisions so that children are protected from lifelong collateral consequences, and the [Youth Justice & Opportunities Act](#) to expand alternatives to incarceration and record sealing for young adults.

“Last year, lawmakers enacted a budget that included desperately needed increased funding for public defender offices and Attorney for the Child providers, who are still grappling with decades of divestment and unprecedented attrition. We hope that Albany will again prioritize our Fiscal Year 2025 funding requests to help guarantee that low-income New Yorkers mired in the criminal or juvenile legal systems or the family regulation system have access to the robust counsel they need and deserve.

“Lastly, with the pause of student loan payments lifted in October, we look forward to advancing [HESC/DALF expansion](#) legislation to increase student loan assistance for lawyers serving the public interest to help with crushing student loan debt, which often forces attorneys to leave non-profit or government positions for the private sector.”

### **More Background**

NYC public defenders’ 2024 statewide legislative priorities: <http://tinyurl.com/5uezbxzbz>.

Legal Aid’s Civil Practice’s 2024 statewide legislative priorities: <http://tinyurl.com/2p9b782f>.

Legal Aid’s Juvenile Rights Practice’s 2024 statewide legislative priorities: <http://tinyurl.com/bdhu27as>.

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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 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](http://www.legalaidnyc.org)*