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

Over 600 Attorneys Sign Advocacy Letter Calling on Albany to Enact Legislation to Increase Student Loan Aid for Attorneys Serving the Public Interest

(NEW YORK, NY) - Over 600 public defenders, civil legal services attorney and other lawyers serving the public interest signed onto a [letter calling](#) on Governor Hochul and the New York State Legislature to ensure the inclusion of [legislation](#) in the upcoming budget which would bolster the District Attorney and Indigent Legal Services Attorney Loan Forgiveness (DALF) program, administered by the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation.

The legislation, carried by State Senator Jessica Ramos and Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon, would increase student loan aid from up to \$3,400 to \$8,000 annually, for up to eight years, or total award eligibility of up to \$64,000 in total.

Under the current program, lawyers serving the public interest can receive up to a total of \$20,400 over six years to pay down their student loans, 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. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the federal student loan pause gave experienced public sector attorneys critical financial relief, allowing them to stay in their jobs and provide essential advocacy to low-income New Yorkers. With the ending of the pause and the sky-rocketing cost of living in the state, the need to expand this loan assistance program is more crucial than ever. HESC/DALF funds ensure all New Yorkers have access to justice.

The letter states:

HESC DALF money is one of the few sources of student debt relief open to those of us with private student loans. Attorneys of color and first-generation borrowers are more likely to hold private

student debt that cannot be discharged via Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) or other federal programs. For attorneys who grew up in the very communities they serve, making careers in public service sustainable is

an important policy that should be honored. We strongly encourage you, our elected representatives, to make the \$4 million necessary to fund this expansion a budget priority.

“Our public interest attorneys work day-in and day-out for their clients, and they deserve relief from the crippling student loan payments that are inhibiting their ability to both effectively serve their clients and pay their own bills,” said **Twyla Carter, Attorney-in-Chief and Chief Executive Officer of The Legal Aid Society**. “Rising attrition levels across our organizations — a direct result of shouldering our attorneys with additional financial burdens like student loan payments — severely hinder the access low-income New Yorkers have to valiant, high-quality representation. Governor Hochul and the New York State Legislature must ensure that this legislation is prioritized in the upcoming budget to keep our justice system fair and accessible for all.”

“Astronomical student loan bills and increased living costs continue to force more of our union members out of public service careers. Yet, we know how much experience matters when it comes to legal advocacy,” said **Lisa Ohta, President of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (UAW Local 2325)**. “All New Yorkers deserve experienced lawyers by their side in court. Increasing the HESC/DALF award will make it more sustainable for our members to remain where they belong, serving New Yorkers and their communities.”

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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. <https://www.legalaidnyc.org>