



*"Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public." – Cornel West*

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CONTACT: Alex Dery Snider

[aderysnider@empirejustice.org](mailto:aderysnider@empirejustice.org), 202.641.5124

## CIVIL LEGAL SERVICE COMMUNITY THANKS GOVERNOR FOR RESCINDING PROPOSED 'SWEEP' OF FUNDS EARMARKED TO HELP LOW-INCOME NEW YORKERS ACCESS JUSTICE

The civil legal services community applauded Governor Hochul for rescinding the proposed 'sweep' of \$100 million earmarked to support low-income New Yorkers' civil legal needs into New York's the General Fund. The sweep of the Interest on Lawyers Account (IOLA) was originally proposed in the executive budget and was rescinded in the 30-day amendments released late in the day on February 15.

IOLA funds are not taxpayer dollars; they are earmarked for the sole purpose of funding civil legal services. IOLA currently supports 81 non-profit legal organizations in every region of the state as they serve low-income New Yorkers with civil legal problems affecting their most basic needs, such as food, shelter, jobs and access to health care. In the last year, IOLA grantees closed over 307,000 cases benefiting nearly 640,000 New Yorkers and generating over \$3.5 billion of economic benefit to New York. At no time in IOLA's 40-year history -- despite the budget fluctuations facing the state through those years -- have these funds been diverted to any other purpose.

"The IOLA Fund is grateful for the support of the entire legal community in preserving the integrity of the IOLA Fund and ensuring that the revenue from IOLA accounts remains dedicated solely to the provision of civil legal services for low-income New Yorkers. We're pleased that Governor Hochul recognized the importance of IOLA accounts in the practice of law, and the importance of the IOLA Fund in addressing the justice gap in New York," said **Chris O'Malley, Executive Director of IOLA**.

"Preserving the integrity of IOLA funds is critical to our community's work helping low-income New Yorkers access justice," said **Tina Monshipour Foster, Executive Director, JustCause and Board President, NY Legal Services Coalition**. "IOLA is a core funder for our community and we look forward to continuing to work with them strengthen and grow the dedicated civil legal aid workforce and to close the Access to Justice Gap."

"Empire Justice Center is grateful to Governor Hochul for her decision to rescind the proposal to sweep IOLA funds. Using these funds for any purpose besides civil legal services would have undermined New York's standing as a leader in advancing access to justice. We appreciate the Governor's affirmation of the independence of our IOLA Fund look forward to continuing to work together in improving the administration of justice in our great state," said **Kristin Brown, President and CEO of Empire Justice Center**.

"We welcome Governor Hochul's decision to remove this problematic language from the budget that threatened to dismantle essential legal services relied upon by hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers across our state annually," said **Adriene Holder, Chief Attorney of the Civil Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. "Budgets reflect values and priorities. In both good and bad fiscal times, budgets should never be balanced on the backs of low-income people, especially in a state that purports to prioritize the needs of underserved communities above all else."

"The Center for Elder Law & Justice thanks Governor Hochul for taking action to restore IOLA funds for their intended use to fund civil legal services so that New Yorkers can continue to access legal help for life's essentials like housing, income stability and abuse prevention. This action will help mitigate the wage inequity between government positions and civil legal services positions," said **Karen Nicolson, CEO of the Center for Elder Law and Justice in Buffalo**.

"Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A is heartened by Governor Hochul appropriate corrective action in restoring IOLA funds for its intended purpose in the Executive Budget. The IOLA fund is an essential support to critical civil legal services across the state and its stability is of utmost importance to its grantee legal service providers," said **Jessica Rose, Executive Director of Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A**.

"New York Lawyers for the Public Interest thanks Governor Hochul for restoring the IOLA funds held in trust to support civil legal services for New Yorkers in need," said **McGregor Smyth, Executive Director of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**. "We are proud that the legal community spoke in one voice about the critical and permanent role of the IOLA Fund in closing the justice gap."

#### **About the New York Legal Services Coalition**

The New York Legal Services Coalition is a statewide association that represents the interests of civil legal services organizations and the communities they serve. Our 45 plus members collectively provide direct legal representation and systems change advocacy in a variety of areas including family law, housing, elder rights, immigration, health care and civil rights across all 62 counties of New York State.