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Contact:

Redmond Haskins
Director of Media Relations
The Legal Aid Society
929.441.2384
rhaskins@legal-aid.org

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

Legal Aid Files Lawsuit to Force Adams Administration to Fully Implement CityFHEPS Reform and Expansion Laws

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society today filed a class action lawsuit in New York State Supreme Court against Mayor Eric Adams and the City to compel the Administration to fully implement the recently enacted package of legislation that reforms and expands the City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS) program, a local housing voucher for New Yorkers on the brink of or experiencing homelessness.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of New Yorkers who would be eligible for CityFHEPS under the new laws but who are barred from accessing the rent subsidy because the Adams Administration has refused to implement the reforms.

The New York City Charter requires City agencies to enforce and implement all measures enacted into law, including those enacted via a Council override. Moreover, State law allows for parties to sue localities when government officials have “failed to perform a duty enjoined upon [them] by law”.

Memo of law: <http://tinyurl.com/5n9ykhwr>

Petition: <http://tinyurl.com/5588jtmb>

Legal Aid’s lawsuit seeks the full implementation of:

- [Local Law 99 of 2023](#), which permits voucher holders to lease apartments for the full voucher amount without having to first deduct utility expenses, placing CityFHEPS families on par with Section 8 vouchers holders;
- [Local Law 100 of 2023](#), which increases income eligibility from 200 percent of the poverty line to 50 percent of area median income to expand access to more New Yorkers in need;
- [Local Law 101 of 2023](#), which expands eligibility for CityFHEPS to any income eligible household at risk of eviction;
- [Local Law 102 of 2023](#), which precludes the City from basing eligibility on employment status.

The litigation is a result of a months-long dispute between the City Council and the Adams Administration, which began after the City Council [passed](#) the legislative package on May 25, 2023. On June 23, 2023, Mayor Adams [vetoed](#) the legislation. On July 13, 2023, the City Council [overrode](#) the Mayor's veto of the legislation, and these measures should have [taken effect](#) on January 9, 2024.

“The Adams Administration’s refusal to implement the law is unacceptable, and the City must take immediate action to ensure that the thousands of New Yorkers who are experiencing or are on the brink of homelessness and who are now eligible for CityFHEPS can secure safe, long-term and affordable housing,” said **Robert Desir, Staff Attorney with the Civil Law Reform Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “We look forward to fighting on behalf of our clients and all New Yorkers who are facing housing instability and who could benefit from these laws.”

“The CityFHEPS laws would keep families housed, reduce the stress on our city’s shelter network, and remove barriers to life-saving vouchers if the Administration would follow the law,” said **Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala**. “Unfortunately, the Administration's failure to comply with these laws and its insistence on playing politics only harms New Yorkers. I strongly support The Legal Aid Society's efforts to see these laws be implemented and I want to thank them for elevating the voices of all New Yorkers that are negatively impacted by the Mayor’s complete disregard and failure to follow the law.”

“Let’s be clear: the laws that this alleged ‘law-and-order’ Mayor is refusing to implement, in flagrant defiance of his legal obligation, comprise a common-sense, cost-effective legislative package that will move struggling New Yorkers from the shelter system into permanent housing more efficiently – period,” said **Council Member Tiffany Cabán**. “The Mayor’s disrespect for everyday New Yorkers, especially those facing homelessness, not to mention this Council and our Speaker, is shameful. He has proven that he cannot be trusted. This city deserves so much better. I salute Legal Aid for fighting back and urge the courts to compel the Mayor to implement the law, as his fabricated reputation would seem to demand.”

“New York's intersecting crises of rising evictions, record homelessness and housing unaffordability are only worsening. The most recent housing vacancy survey highlights the lowest vacancy rate on record since the 1960s, showing that nearly 90 percent of low-income New Yorkers are severely rent burdened, and low-income people of color are leaving our city in record numbers. As we chart the path forward, we cannot pick and choose interventions. We must increase housing supply to accommodate the city’s needed growth, invest in building upgrades so our buildings do not fall, and increase New Yorkers’ ability to afford our homes so we can stay and contribute to our city’s vibrancy. Thus, the expansion of City FHEPs housing vouchers - so that more New Yorkers can afford their homes and avoid evictions -- is a critical component to solving the housing crisis,” said **Council Member Pierina Sanchez**. “In sponsoring these bills and chairing the Council’s housing committee, I am proud of Legal Aid’s push to not relent on behalf of the low income and working class New Yorkers.”

“New York City could save \$730 million and help 92,000 of our neighbors avoid becoming homeless and entering shelter if the Adams Administration fully implemented the CityFHEPS reforms passed by the City Council last spring. In other words, enacting these bills isn’t just smart policy — it’s the right thing to do,” said **Christine Quinn, CEO & President of Win**. “According to HarrisX, over 60% of New Yorkers believe long-term systemic policy changes like expanding vouchers are critical to addressing homelessness, and nearly 70% of New Yorkers understand that families become homeless because our safety net is broken. That's why I applaud the City Council for enacting this package of forward-looking reforms and thank Legal Aid for taking the necessary actions to ensure New Yorkers have access to safe, affordable housing. I urge the City to listen to the vast majority of New Yorkers who support expanding housing vouchers and fully implement these laws.”

Background on named plaintiffs

- Mary Cronneit is 86-years-old and has lived in her rent-stabilized home for over 22 years. Her monthly rent is \$1033.73. Mrs. Cronneit’s husband passed away during the COVID outbreak, and as a result, she lost her Special Exit and Prevention Supplement rent subsidy. Ms. Cronneit does not have any income.

Her family members assist her in various ways but are unable to pay the monthly rent. In 2021, Ms. Cronneit's landlord began an eviction proceeding. Ms. Cronneit does not qualify for CityFHEPS given the City's narrow criteria and will be evicted and enter the homeless system. Her family does not have room to house her.

- Carolina Tejada is a single mother living in the Bronx with her 11-year-old daughter. In 2011, she sustained devastating injuries in a car accident yet continued working until about 2019, when she was forced to stop due to worsening health issues.

Last October, Ms. Tejada's landlord sued her for nonpayment, seeking to evict Ms. Tejada and her daughter from their home. Ms. Tejada does not qualify for CityFHEPS given the City's narrow criteria and she faces imminent eviction. She and her daughter have nowhere else to go and will be forced to enter the shelter system for the first time in their lives.

- Susan Acks is a 66-year-old disabled senior who has resided in the same rent-stabilized apartment in Brooklyn for almost 40 years. She worked as a pianist and musical director, but her career ended roughly 20 years ago when she was injured in a bus accident, which rendered her permanently disabled. Her monthly rent is frozen at \$1,062.33. After her longtime roommate moved out in early 2023, she could no longer afford the rent and began accruing arrears.

Last year, Ms. Acks' landlord commenced a nonpayment eviction proceeding. She does not qualify for CityFHEPS given the City's narrow criteria and she faces imminent eviction and homelessness.

If Local Law 101 was implemented, Mary Cronneit, Carolina Tejada and Susan Acks would be able to remain in their homes.

- Marie Vincent is a cancer survivor and lives at a local homeless shelter with her 12-year-old grandson. The family entered shelter in May 2023 when they were forced from their long-time home in the Bronx after a new landlord purchased the building and evicted all the tenants. Ms. Vincent works in housekeeping at a hospital and, under the new laws, should qualify for CityFHEPS with her current income of approximately \$42,000 per year. However, Ms. Vincent's income is a small amount above the City's current level for CityFHEPS, and consequently she cannot obtain a voucher.

If the City implemented both Local Law 100 and Local Law 99, Marie Vincent could obtain a CityFHEPS shopping letter required to secure an apartment at the full CityFHEPS maximum rent.

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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