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

Ahead of April 1st, LAS and ALAA Call on Albany to Ensure the Budget Inclusion of Legislation to Increase Student Loan Assistance for Lawyers Serving the Public Interest

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society and the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys UAW Local 2325, ahead of New York State's April 1, 2024 budget deadline, called on Governor Hochul and the New York State Legislature to ensure the budget inclusion of [legislation](#) that 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.

Earlier this month, the Senate [overwhelmingly passed](#) the bipartisan measure, and the Assembly included DALF in their [one-house budget](#).

Additionally, more than [600 individual attorneys](#) and [35 district attorneys, public defender offices, civil legal services providers, and unions](#) throughout New York signed advocacy letters urging Albany to enact the critical DALF legislation.

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 skyrocketing cost of living in the state, the need to expand this loan assistance program is [more crucial than ever](#).

"Inclusion of the DALF in the FY25 budget is a crucial step toward a more equitable justice system, as high student loan debt drives public interest attorneys out of our organization and decreases the number of highly skilled attorneys available to take on new cases for low-income New Yorkers in need," said **Twyla Carter**,

Attorney-In-Chief and CEO of The Legal Aid Society. “With both the Senate and Assembly — as well as district attorneys and public defenders across the State — having shown their robust support for the DALF, it is now more critical than ever that Governor Kathy Hochul takes action to ensure that this bipartisan legislation is finally codified into law.”

“Student debt relief allows public interest attorneys to stay in the work and continue to provide zealous representation to New Yorkers in all communities,” said **Lisa Ohta, President of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (UAW Local 2325)**. “By including DALF in this year’s budget, Governor Hochul has the opportunity to provide financial support to essential workers in our state courts and strengthen access to justice across the state.”

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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>