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Ahead of Council Budget Hearing, Legal Aid's Community Justice Unit Calls on Adams Administration to Keep Communities Safe by Restoring Funding to Support Community-Oriented, Violence-Prevention Efforts

As a Result of City's PEG, Legal Aid's CJU Faces a \$1.5 Million Funding Reduction, Which Would Sever New Yorkers' Ability to Access Critical Legal Services and other Needed Resources in the Community

Crisis Management System Partners, Community Groups and Others Demand that City Hall Reverse this Funding Cut

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society - ahead of a City Council budget hearing on funding, including the budgetary needs of New York City's Crisis Management System (CMS) providers - called on the Adams Administration to restore \$1.5 million in funding to Legal Aid's Community Justice Unit (CJU) to ensure that New Yorkers have access to critical legal services and other resources right in their communities.

This demand was also echoed by the founding CMS partners, organizations that started the CMS movement in New York City and who work with CJU on a regular basis providing programming to the community to reduce gun violence.

As part of the City's Program to Eliminate the Gap, the City recently notified Legal Aid that its CJU's funding would be cut by \$1.5 million in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget, which would have a devastating impact on efforts to further public safety in New York City.

This proposed cut to CJU's funding is a disinvestment in underserved communities, particularly underserved youth, because CJU's services target those vulnerable communities. Because CMS will be expanding to 40 sites operating in 31 neighborhoods boroughwide, there is a greater demand for CJU's legal wrap-around services.

Full testimony: <https://tinyurl.com/yc2mthhr>.

Background on CJU

CJU was established in 2012 as part of the CMS model by the City Council's Task Force to Combat Gun Violence. CJU adopts the Cure Violence philosophy – that violence can be curtailed with early intervention and community

engagement – and provides comprehensive legal services to CMS partners, participants, and community members to reduce gun and gang violence in their neighborhoods. CJU offers direct representation to thousands of New Yorkers experiencing legal emergencies. CJU's comprehensive legal services empower at-risk youth and their families to navigate criminal, housing, immigration, and any other legal issues that require assistance so they can improve their circumstances.

In addition to legal counsel, CJU conducts extensive community outreach, including providing legal clinics and trainings at over 40 Cure Violence/Crisis Management partner locations and the catchment areas they serve. CJU staff and attorneys hold community events across all five boroughs, including Know Your Rights events, rallies, and educational clinics.

To help combat youth's early involvement in the criminal justice system, CJU's community organizer's lead several Know Your Rights trainings and workshops. For example, CJU leads a Youth Ambassador Training where youth learn how to organize their communities and teach other community members about their legal rights when interacting with police. CJU also leads cure violence workshops at schools and at our CMS partner sites throughout the city.

Through these comprehensive legal services, CJU works to defend, educate, and organize community members. CJU's defense services include running a critical 24/7 hotline for legal emergencies, such as arrests and housing evictions, helping individuals obtain their rap sheets and seal their criminal records, and assisting New Yorkers with employment and family law issues.

CJU educates community members on their rights to help them navigate legal systems and to access vital services that respond to their legal and social service needs. CJU organizes community members to harness community power and mobilize communities to advocate for resources and social justice. As a result of our work, community members receive legal services that they otherwise might not be able to access, and those services directly contribute to their improved circumstances and safer communities.

CJU's Impact

Funding CJU is an investment in communities that are in crises. In Fiscal Year 2023, CJU provided 7,045 legal services, including 5,378 services to Cure Violence partner organizations and 1,667 to non-affiliated community members throughout New York City.

These numbers include over 500 services to Project Hope and Project Reset. During FY23, CJU also organized 140 events, including various community town halls led by the Gun Violence Task Force regarding Mayor Adams's Community Safety Plan, a continuation of the Blueprint to End Gun Violence, which focuses on prevention and intervention strategies using public health and community development models to address the root causes of gun violence.

CJU also held rallies for our clients and communities to exercise their civic duty through our "Your Vote Matters Symposium." The event saw many partner organizations come together to discuss the significance of voting, the impact of criminal disenfranchisement, and how to strengthen neighborhoods.

As successful as FY23 was, CJU has provided 4,074 services for the first 6 months of FY24. If that trend continues, CJU is on track for around a 15 percent increase in legal services. CJU's increase in legal services means more underserved communities – experiencing over-policing, unstable housing, limited employment opportunities, and an overall lack of adequate services – can address their basic needs.

Full report: <https://tinyurl.com/u67fmebn>.

“Our vital legal wrap-around services enable healthier communities and co-produce public safety in our city by proactively responding to people who are in crises and by defending them in the punitive and racist criminal legal system, educating them on their rights, and helping families organize to keep communities whole,” said **Anthony Posada, Supervising Attorney with the Community Justice Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “The Mayor’s decision risks undoing the cure violence model’s progress in reducing gun violence in our communities. We call on the Adams Administration to immediately reverse this proposed cut.”

Letters of Support

Street Corner Resources: <https://tinyurl.com/47z7ncj6>,

Good Shepherd Services: <https://tinyurl.com/5n7h8w7n>.

Central Family Life Center: <https://tinyurl.com/yc64tjf5>.

Neighbors in Action: <https://tinyurl.com/4yez9se9>.

Man Up! NYC: <https://tinyurl.com/4xjt8e33>

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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