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Contact:

Audrey Martin
The Legal Aid Society
amartin@legal-aid.org

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Attorneys, Advocates, Impacted New Yorkers, Elected Officials and Others Demand Passage of Legislation to End the Lifetime Ban on Jury Service for People with Felony Convictions

(NEW YORK, NY) - Attorneys, advocates, impacted New Yorkers, elected officials and others today called on Governor Kathy Hochul and the NY State Legislature to pass the [Jury of Our Peers Act](#), legislation that would end the lifetime ban on jury service for people with felony convictions.

New York law permanently disqualifies people with felony convictions from serving on a jury, no matter the offense, how long ago the conviction took place, or what they have since done to rehabilitate their lives. The Jury of Our Peers Act, sponsored by NY State Senator Cordell Cleare and Assemblymember Jeffrion Aubry, would put an end to that ban and allow more New Yorkers to meaningfully participate in the fundamental civic function of our democracy that is serving on a jury.

The legislation – which will strengthen our democracy and public confidence in our legal system – is [supported by the American Probation and Parole Association](#) who “strongly believes that bringing people with past convictions into the democratic process is a vital part of successful reintegration.” A version of the bill was passed by the NY State Senate in 2019 and the current bill has over 50 cosponsors in the assembly and 19 in the Senate.

”I am proud to sponsor the Jury of Our Peers Act because I believe that we must end the vestiges of the Black Codes and create pathways for our neighbors, friends and family to successfully reenter our communities after they have served their time. The lifetime ban on jury service for people with felony convictions - which affects nearly 1 million New Yorkers, the majority of whom are Black and brown - must end now. Passage of this commonsense bill will create more racial equity and fairness in our criminal legal system and is a top priority for me in my final days of service in the New York State Assembly,” said **Assemblymember Jeffrion Aubry**, Speaker Pro Tempore and Assembly Prime Sponsor of the bill.

Senator Cordell Cleare, Jury of our Peers Act Prime Sponsor said, “This bill is important to me and my community because the most important part of incarceration is rehabilitation and the opportunity to return to your community and participate in civic life and to feel that you are part of society. Every roadblock we put up, such as a lifetime ban on Jury Service is not only inequitable, illogical and counterproductive but can lead to recidivism. The opportunity to learn, grow and rehabilitate is inextricably linked to the principle that one may use these tools to contribute to the betterment of society. There is no place in our state for second class citizenship for the formerly incarcerated and the harmful stigma it carries.

“Prohibiting a portion of our community members — the majority of whom are people of color — from serving on a jury is a grave disservice to our democracy,” said **Phil Desgranges, Attorney-in-Charge of Criminal Law Reform at The Legal Aid Society**. “Lifetime jury bans for individuals with a felony conviction have created stark racial disparities in juries across the State that have eroded public confidence in the quality and fairness of

our jury system. People with felony convictions should not be further stigmatized in our society when they are just as capable of serving as jurors as any other citizen. Our leaders in Albany must put an end to this unnecessary ban by passing the Jury of Our Peers Act before the end of this legislative session.”

“As New York takes steps to challenge the policies that have driven racialized mass incarceration, we must also undo the vast array of collateral consequences that operate as a modern day scarlet letter for anyone with a conviction history. The jury ban for people with felony convictions is just one of the ways an individual is othered, but it is especially insidious in that it creates a negative feedback loop that perpetuates and, in fact, extends systematic racism. By ending the exclusion, this bill acknowledges a jury of one’s peers is an essential part of ensuring a just society and a working democracy,” said **Megan French-Marcelin, Senior Director of NYS Policy at the Legal Action Center.**

“The New York Assembly must vote on and pass the Jury of Our Peers Act without further delay,” said **David R. Jones, President and CEO of the Community Service Society of New York (CSS).** “Just as people are currently able to vote as soon as they are released from prison, they should also be eligible to serve on a jury. Excluding them creates less diverse juries and only exacerbates the disproportionate harm the legal system inflicts on people of color, giving them yet another reason to believe the justice system is anything but. The Jury of Our Peers Act restores faith in our courts and in the vior dire process that ensures, by evaluating each person as an individual, their fitness to serve.”

“For decades, our state’s jury ban has shut thousands of Black New Yorkers out of civic engagement, denying people of color the ability to fully participate in our state’s democratic process,” said **Perry Grossman, Director of Voting Rights Litigation at the New York Civil Liberties Union.** “A jury system that underrepresents Black New Yorkers is one that ultimately sends more Black New Yorkers to jail. By passing the Jury of our Peers Act and restoring this fundamental civil right, lawmakers will be taking an essential step towards equity while paving the way for other states to create a fairer justice system for all.”

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