



January 16, 2025

Governor Kathy Hochul
New York State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

We, the undersigned legislators, urge you to allocate **\$4 million in the proposed Executive FY26 Budget** to fund a modest expansion of the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) District Attorney and Indigent Legal Service Attorney Loan Forgiveness Program (DALF) program. Last year, this expansion bill had strong, bi-partisan support in both chambers. The Assembly included A1568D (Simon) in its FY25 one-house budget and the Senate passed S4511C (Ramos) unanimously.

Our prosecutors, public defenders, and indigent legal services attorneys provide access to justice in their constitutionally and legally mandated roles. As legislators, we have a duty to see these services are provided at the highest levels of excellence.

Yet public sector salaries have failed to keep pace with the rising cost of living, particularly with the increasing costs of monthly student loan payments. Too many of our most experienced attorneys have left public service due to this affordability crisis, resulting in ever-expanding workloads for remaining staff and leaving vulnerable New Yorkers without vital representation in criminal, family, and housing courts. When our courts are backlogged and understaffed, all New Yorkers suffer the impact of delayed justice.

Most attorneys working in public service rely on federal student loan programs such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) and Income Driven Repayment (IDR) to remain in their jobs. As we head into 2025 and a second Trump administration, these vital programs are at great risk. IDR has been attacked in the courts and calls for eliminating or significantly curtailing PSLF are mounting. IDR keeps monthly student loan payments low for public sector workers, and if it is downsized, student loan payments will increase by hundreds of dollars per month. A jump in expenses of that size is likely to send even more public service attorneys into the private sector, or out of New York state entirely. The ongoing attrition crisis in our District Attorneys' offices and legal services agencies will only worsen.

The HESC fund for attorneys working in the public interest or as district attorneys is the lowest of the awards programs offered, despite the fact that lawyers graduate with an average debt of \$130,000. The loan assistance for licensed registered nurses and social workers, who graduate with an average debt of \$76,000, is much more generous.

New York cannot afford to lose more experienced public interest attorneys, neither those who represent people facing serious consequences nor those who speak for victims in our law enforcement offices. Every time one of these lawyers is forced into the private sector for more pay, our collective ability to resolve legal matters grinds to a halt.

By expanding and strengthening the HESC-DALF program, New York can lead the way in ensuring the talented and diverse workers who fight for justice in our courts can remain in their chosen careers. The requested addition of \$4 million in the General Fund, Local Assistance Account earmarked specifically for DALF, along with the approximately \$2 million yearly existing allocation and the legislative language of A1568D/S4511C will right-size the award program by both expanding the total eligible award and the number of years of eligibility.

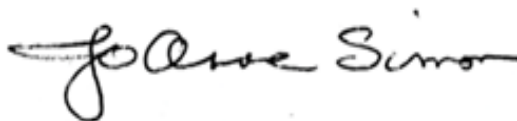
We ask you to make New York a leader in protecting student borrowers working in the public sector, by including \$4 million additional dollars to fund this expansion in your proposed Executive Budget for FY26.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,



Jessica Ramos
State Senator, SD-13



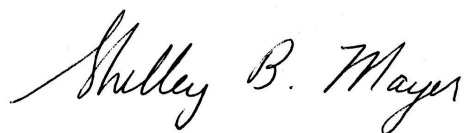
Jo Anne Simon
Assemblymember, AD-52



Robert Jackson
State Senator, SD-31



Andrew Hevesi
Assemblymember, AD-28



Shelley Mayer
State Senator, SD-37



Rebecca A. Seawright
Assemblymember, AD-76



Cordell Cleare
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MaryJane Shimsky
Assemblymember, AD-92



Jabari Brisport
State Senator, SD-25



Sarahana Shrestha
Assemblymember, AD-103



Andrew Gounardes
State Senator, SD-26



Robert Carroll
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Jeremy Cooney
State Senator, SD-56



Phara Souffrant Forrest
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David G. McDonough
Assemblymember, AD-14



Julia Salazar
State Senator, SD-18



Chris Burdick
Assemblymember, AD-93



José M. Serrano
State Senator, SD-29



Steven Raga
Assemblymember, AD-30



Samra G. Brouk



William Conrad

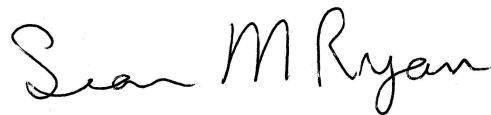
State Senator, SD-55



Gustavo Rivera
State Senator, SD-33



Brad Hoylman-Sigal
State Senator, SD-47



Sean M. Ryan
State Senator, SD-61



April Baskin
State Senator, SD-63




Kristen Gonzalez
State Senator, SD-59



Roxanne J. Persaud
State Senator, SD-19

Assemblymember, AD-140



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Assemblymember, AD-125



Emily Gallagher
Assemblymember, AD-50



Zohran K. Mamdani
Assemblymember, AD-36



Josh Jensen
Assemblymember, AD-134



Linda B. Rosenthal
Assemblymember, AD-67



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Assemblymember, AD-138



Zellnor Myrie
State Senator, SD-20



Alex Bores
Assemblymember, AD-73

Chris Ryan

Chris Ryan
State Senator, SD-50



Jon D. Rivera
Assemblymember, AD-149



Peter Harckham
State Senator, SD-40



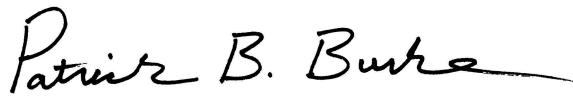
Sarah Clark
Assemblymember, AD-136



Gabriella Romero
Assemblymember, AD-109



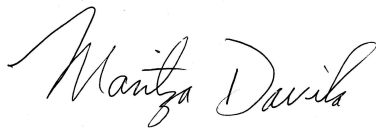
Karen McMahon
Assemblymember, AD-146



Patrick Burke
Assemblymember, AD-142



Jen Lunsford
Assemblymember, AD-135



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Marcela Mitaynes
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Angelo Morinello
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Nader Sayegh
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Al Stirpe
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Assemblymember, AD-104



Jessica González-Rojas
Assemblymember, AD-34



Khaleel M. Anderson
Assemblymember, AD-31



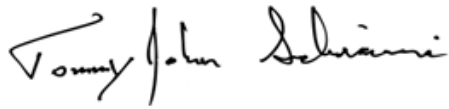
Brian Maher
Assemblymember, AD-101



Tony Simone
Assemblymember, AD-75



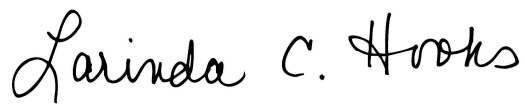
Yudelka Tapia
Assemblymember, AD-86



Tommy John Schiavoni
Assemblymember, AD-1



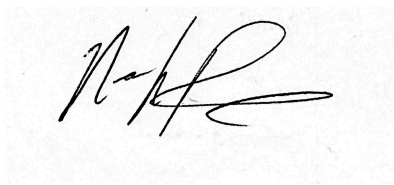
Demond Meeks
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Landon Dais
Assemblymember, AD-77



Noah Burroughs
Assemblymember, AD-18