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January 3, 2025

Hon. Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Hon. Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Majority Leader, New York State Senate
188 State Street LOB - Room 907
Albany, NY 12247

Hon. Carl Heastie
Speaker, New York State Assembly
New York State Capitol Room 349
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Governor Hochul, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie,

As the oldest and largest legal services provider in New York State, dedicated to the rights of low-income New Yorkers and, since our inception in 1876, the needs of immigrants, we urge you to take up critical legislation during the first 90 days of 2025. These essential pieces of legislation have become even more pressing given the incoming federal administration's threats to the communities we serve.

As you return for the legislative session, New York State must take decisive steps to protect vulnerable populations that have already been declared targets of the incoming federal administration and simultaneously carry forth with the ongoing agenda of making New York families and our communities stronger. To this end, we urge the State legislature to immediately pass and the Governor to expeditiously sign the below priorities that will strengthen protections for immigrants, people of color, LGBTQ+ people, low-income children and workers.

We are especially concerned about the incoming administration's demonization of immigrants, who in New York State contribute mightily to our workforce and tax base. An attack on our immigrant neighbors is an attack on all New Yorkers. In NYC alone, the State Comptroller has [reported](#), "In 2023, New York City's 1.8 million foreign-born workers aged 16 years and older

made-up 44.3 percent of the total labor force, more than double the share nationally at 18.6 percent. The City’s foreign-born workers contributed \$383 billion to the real gross City product based on the latest available data in 2022.” A [2024 report by the NYC Comptroller](#) highlighted the fact that immigrants benefit our economy, irrespective of their legal status.

Given the expected threats levied against so many New Yorkers, when session begins, we urge you to respond to those threats by having the Legislature pass, and the Governor sign the following priorities into law.

Protections for Immigrant New Yorkers and Ensuring Access to our Courts

As has been recently [reported](#), immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, [are less likely](#) to [commit crimes](#) than US-born citizens. Despite [police insinuation](#) otherwise, deportable people go through the same criminal justice system as citizens when charged with a crime, and available research has found that “[sanctuary](#)” policies have no effect on reported crime. In fact, sanctuary jurisdictions are associated with lower rates of homicide and assault.

Therefore, we urge passage of:

- **New York for All Act** ([Gounardes S987/ Reyes A5686](#)) prohibits local law enforcement across the state from colluding with ICE.
- **Access to Representation Act** ([Holyman-Sigal S141/Cruz A270](#)) establishes a right to legal representation in immigration court proceedings. Given the increased need for these services, we urge robust funding for immigration representation.
- **Destitute Child Access to Family Court** bill ([Persaud S7260 / Hevesi A3588](#)) which would expand destitute children’s access to family court. This would enable immigrant children to seek orders from the family court that could put them on a path to legal residency and citizenship.

Protections for LGBTQ+ New Yorkers, Reproductive Healthcare and Healthcare for Immigrants

The incoming administration has made clear that they will continue to seek control over reproductive freedom and attack gender-affirming care and access as well as try to eliminate healthcare for immigrants. Therefore, we urge passage of:

- **The Coverage4All Act** ([Rivera S2237B/ Gonzalez-Rojas A3020B](#)) seeks federal funding to cover 150,000 income-eligible immigrants in the Essential Plan. It would also save over \$400 million in State Emergency Medicaid.
- **Sanctuary Law for Gender Affirming Care** ([Hoylman-Sigal S7506-A/Bronson A7686-A](#)) protects all health care providers who offer gender-affirming or reproductive health care.

The incoming federal administration presents a significant threat to transgender, gender nonconforming & non-binary (TGNCNBI) people. We urge you to continue to ensure that low-income New Yorkers of all ages have access to gender-affirming care, regardless of any steps taken by the Trump administration. This commitment is consistent with your longstanding efforts to advance LGBTQ+ equity and essential for the well-being of TGNCNBI New Yorkers.

- **Gender Identity Respect, Dignity and Safety Act** ([S4702A Sepulveda /A5257A Rozic](#)) would help keep TGNCNBI people safe by requiring that prisons and jails presumptively house people consistently with their gender identities unless the person requests otherwise, with a list of reasons that cannot be used as the basis for a denial. This will ensure that staff at facilities respect a person's gender identity in all contexts, including name and pronoun use and during searches; and mandating access to clothing, toiletry items, and grooming standards consistent with a person's gender identity.

We are concerned about immigrants who are eligible for health care currently (such as DACA and TPS) but may lose their eligibility if the new Administration eliminates their immigration status. We urge the state to continue to provide health care to those immigrants.

Protections for New York Families and Communities

Under the leadership of Governor Hochul and the Legislature, New York has made progress in strengthening support for low-income families and providing a springboard towards more durable economic security, but there is still more to accomplish.

With impending threats to reduce federal housing assistance, block grant Medicaid and SNAP, and further limit the already greatly restricted immigrant eligibility for these federal benefits, New York must be a leader in protecting the lowest income New Yorkers. Thus, we urge passage of:

- **Housing Access Voucher Program** ([Kavanagh S72/ Rosenthal A4021](#)) creates a state-wide Section 8 program which allows localities to extend benefits regardless of immigration status. The Governor's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC) recommends a similar program.
- **Empower New York City to Extend Housing Benefits to New York Residents Regardless of Immigration Status** ([Kavanagh S1631/ Rosenthal A5513](#)) applies to municipalities throughout the state and extends to benefits generally, not just housing benefits.
- **Ensure Food Assistance is available to all New York Families.** There are already many gaps in eligibility for federal SNAP and concerns that this crucial program will become even less accessible under the new federal Administration. No New Yorker should go hungry. Adopting a state-funded food assistance program that

would be available for New Yorkers ineligible for SNAP because of immigration status along the lines being recommended by CPRAC is critical.

Protection for Workers

Workers will also be a target of the new federal administration. Immigrant workers are critical to New York's economy. They are the backbone of healthcare, agriculture, construction and hospitality industries. Therefore, we urge passage of:

- **Temporary Disability Insurance and Paid Leave bill** ([Ramos S172 / Solages A84](#)) increases the number of benefits available to people with temporary disabilities, provides job protection, expands protections under the existing paid family leave program regardless of immigration status.
- **Unemployment Bridge Program** ([Ramos S173 / Reyes A 4821](#)) provides for unemployment benefits for undocumented workers, workers recently released from incarceration, low-income self-employed workers, and certain cash economy workers.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. We will send you our other session priorities separately, but here we've focused on the most emergent issues. We look forward to working with all of you to make New York a fairer and more just state for the people and communities we serve.

Sincerely,



Twyla Carter
Attorney-In-Chief and Chief Executive Officer
The Legal Aid Society