



January 22, 2025

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

***Legal Aid and the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys Respond to Governor Hochul’s Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget, Which Fails to Include 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 issued the following respective statements in response to Governor Kathy Hochul’s failure to include language in her Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget to increase student loan assistance for lawyers serving the public interest:

“We are deeply disappointed that Governor Hochul’s FY26 Executive Budget once again neglects to include funding to enhance student loan assistance for attorneys dedicated to serving the public interest,” said **Twyla Carter, Attorney-in-Chief and Chief Executive Officer at The Legal Aid Society**. “Year after year, these attorneys work tirelessly to deliver critical legal services to countless vulnerable New Yorkers. Yet, funding for their student loan relief remains stagnant. This lack of action drives committed and experienced public interest attorneys out of the sector at a time when their expertise is more urgently needed than ever.”

“Our members are the backbone of NY’s court system. For our public interest attorneys, programs like HESC DALF are a shield against our state’s affordability crisis. Governor Hochul must rectify this mistake and include it in the Executive Budget or she will be pushing our members out of public service,” said **Lisa Ohta, President of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (UAW Local 2325)**. “This bill is bipartisan, it passed the Senate unanimously last year, was in the Assembly one-house and last week over a third of legislators called on the Governor to include it in her budget. Right now the choice is hers, her entire budget is centered around

affordability, our members will remember if she decided to make New York more affordable for them, or if she single handedly made the crisis worse. ”

## **Background**

[Legislation](#) to bolster the District Attorney and Indigent Legal Services Attorney Loan Forgiveness (DALF) program, carried by State Senator Jessica Ramos and Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon, would increase student loan aid for public interest lawyers 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.

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](#).

On Friday, 69 members of the New York State Legislature signed onto a [letter](#) calling on Governor Hochul to lead the fight to protect student borrowers and ensure the inclusion of funding in the FY26 Executive Budget for legislation that would bolster the DALF program.

In December, 37 district attorneys, public defender organizations and unions also [signed](#) onto a [letter](#) calling on Hochul to ensure the inclusion of funding for this critical legislation.

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