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

Legal Aid and the Association of Legal Advocates and Attorneys Respond to Senate and Assembly One-House Budget Proposals

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society and The Association of Legal Advocates and Attorneys UAW Local 2325 issued the following respective statements in response to the respective one-house budgets released by the New York State Senate and New York State Assembly:

“The respective one-house budget proposals make it clear that the Legislature is ready to pass critically needed legislation to help attorneys serving the public interest manage exorbitant student loan debt,” said **Twyla Carter, Attorney-in-Chief and Chief Executive Officer at The Legal Aid Society**. “We thank Senate and Assembly lawmakers for recognizing that this modest funding increase will help our organizations better retain the dedicated and experienced lawyers whose work is essential in keeping people housed, reuniting families, and protecting the rights of New Yorkers. As Governor Kathy Hochul failed to include funding for this critical legislation in her proposed budget, it is now incumbent on Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, and lawmakers from both chambers to ensure its inclusion in the final budget.”

“Student debt continues to drive our members out of the legal services jobs they love, starving communities of necessary advocates in these frightening times. The federal student loan programs we rely on are in peril and we are thankful to the Senate and Assembly for addressing the problem head on and making sure experienced public interest attorneys will get the relief they need to continue to provide stellar legal representation to the most vulnerable in our state,” said **Lisa Ohta, President of the Association of Legal Advocates and Attorneys, UAW Local 2325**. “Where the federal government threatens to harm the workers who provide critical legal services, Governor Hochul, Speaker Heastie, and Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins can lead by including this in the final budget and ensuring legal services attorneys are not crushed by overwhelming student debt.”

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](#).

In January, 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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