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Legal Aid to Governor Hochul: Ensure All Stakeholders — Especially the Defense Bar — Have a Seat at the Table on Discovery Reform Negotiations

(NEW YORK, NY) - **The Legal Aid Society** issued the following statement, urging Governor Kathy Hochul to ensure that all stakeholders in the criminal legal system—especially the defense bar—have a seat at the table in discovery reform negotiations:

“Since Governor Kathy Hochul introduced her budget in January, the criminal defense bar—including local public defenders who collectively represent hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers in court each year—has been denied access and excluded from having a seat at the table to discuss a proposal that would profoundly impact the lives of the people we represent.

“The Governor has relied almost exclusively on the counsel of District Attorneys and other law enforcement officials to draft and advocate for her proposal, denying the defense bar any direct opportunity to provide input to her office.

“In 2022, public defenders and prosecutors were brought together to discuss discovery, share their concerns, and find common ground on improvements to strengthen the discovery statute. That effort succeeded, resulting in thoughtful, targeted reforms that satisfied all parties.

“When key voices are excluded, policy — regardless of the subject — is more likely to be flawed, ineffective, and unjust. Excluding critical perspectives, particularly from those directly impacted, undermines the integrity of the decision-making process and ultimately harms the very people the policy is meant to serve.

“The Legislature has kept its door open, and we appreciate their ongoing willingness to seek our input as subject matter experts in this critical area.

“Our request is simple: convene all criminal legal stakeholders, share your full current proposal, and let’s work together to strengthen our discovery laws so that all the diverse constituencies we each represent will be proud of the result.”

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The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For nearly 150 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. www.legalaidnyc.org