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

***The Legal Aid Society and The Association of Legal Advocates and Attorneys
Respond to the FY2026 New York State Budget***

(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 New York State's Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Executive Budget:

“We are extremely disappointed that funding to bolster the District Attorney and Indigent Legal Services Attorney Loan Forgiveness (DALF) program, which would have provided a much-needed increase in student loan assistance for attorneys serving the public interest, has been left out of the State budget,” said **Twyla Carter, Attorney-in-Charge and Chief Executive Officer at The Legal Aid Society**. “This modest \$4 million funding increase would have allowed our organizations to better retain the dedicated and experienced lawyers whose work is essential in keeping people housed, reuniting families, and protecting the rights of all New Yorkers. Governor Kathy Hochul’s failure to include this funding in the budget means it is now incumbent upon members of the New York State Legislature to prioritize passing the bipartisan DALF legislation in the remaining days of session. Now more than ever, given the current federal administration’s assault on student loan borrowers, state action is critical to ensure more public interest attorneys can remain in their positions helping the low-income individuals who rely on the free legal services they provide.”

“Governor Hochul claims to care about public safety and our state’s growing affordability crisis, but for the third year in a row she has failed to support the workers who keep our courts running and give them relief from the crushing student loan debt that drives them out of the public sector. The defense community, District Attorneys, and the New York State AFL-CIO were united around this bill as a commonsense no-brainer to keep committed attorneys in their jobs.” said **Lisa Ohta, President of UAW Local 2325/Association of Legal Advocates and**

Attorneys. “Over 95% of legal services attorneys in New York City are UAW members and we will not forget that Governor Hochul had the chance to protect us from federal rollbacks to student loan programs and chose to leave us behind.”

Background

Legislation to bolster the 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.

On March 7, the Trump administration signed an Executive Order that would place new restrictions on the Public Interest Loan Forgiveness Program, which since 2007 has been a release valve for public interest attorneys who, after ten years of on-time payments and qualifying work in the public interest, were able to apply for loan cancellation.

At the same time, the Biden-Era SAVE program, which ties a borrower’s payments to income and household size, has been in legal limbo since last August when Republican-led states sued to end the program and the Supreme Court upheld a lower court’s suspension. Additionally, just this month, the Department of Education began collecting on the over 5 million borrowers in default status, many of whom are in such positions because of the attacks on income-based loan repayment programs.

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