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***Legal Aid Society Releases Testimony from Chief Judge Wilson’s Hearing on
Civil Legal Services***

***Now More Than Ever, Civil Legal Services Are Needed to Protect Low Income
New Yorkers from Harmful Federal Policies***

(ALBANY, NY) – The Legal Aid Society released [testimony](#) today from New York State Court of Appeals Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson’s annual hearing on civil legal services, urging continued funding to protect low-income New Yorkers amid escalating federal threats.

The testimony highlighted Legal Aid’s landmark litigation that expanded Medicaid dental coverage, underscoring how civil legal services not only secure access to justice but also drive systemic reforms that combat racism, poverty, and inequality.

Legal Aid also cautioned that these gains are at risk under new federal legislation, H.R. 1, which slashes \$1 trillion from Medicaid over the next decade — the largest cut in the program’s history. The law is expected to strip coverage from as many as 1.5 million New Yorkers through harsh work requirements and burdensome renewal rules, disproportionately harming immigrants, seniors, and transgender and gender-nonconforming people.

Additionally, Legal Aid underscored the need to continue moving toward the long-term goal of \$200 million annually, beginning with an increase of at least \$25 million this year, paired with a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA). Without this additional investment, programs and staff will be destabilized at precisely the moment when demand for services is increasing.

“From expanding dental coverage to safeguarding health care access, civil legal services deliver life-changing results for the people and communities we serve,” said **Adriene Holder, Chief Attorney of the Civil Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “But with harmful federal policies threatening to roll back these gains, continued investment is essential to ensure low-income New Yorkers can maintain the coverage, care, and stability they need.”

Background

For decades, New York’s Medicaid program excluded molar root canals, crowns, and dental implants, forcing people to have teeth pulled or go without prosthetic replacement. In 2018, The Legal Aid Society and pro bono partners filed suit to overturn these restrictions. In 2023, the New York State Department of Health agreed to a settlement, and in 2024 new rules took effect — extending coverage for medically necessary dental care to an estimated five million adults statewide.

This litigation perfectly underscores the importance of fully funding civil legal services, particularly in these perilous times, when vulnerable New Yorkers are under heightened threat from harmful federal policies and systemic barriers to care.

For example, Matthew Adinolfi, a North Country resident and lead plaintiff in the case, lost most of his teeth after a severe infection. The dentures he received never fit, leaving him in constant pain and unable to eat properly. For more than a decade, he lived without functional teeth, which limited his diet, isolated him socially, and deeply affected his quality of life. He described growing increasingly depressed and avoiding relationships and public life because of his appearance and discomfort.

With Legal Aid's support, Mr. Adinolfi was finally able to access care that Medicaid had long denied. He secured a dentist willing to provide treatment, obtained charitable assistance to cover services excluded by Medicaid, and ensured that necessary procedures were authorized. After years of struggle, Mr. Adinolfi received a full set of teeth — ending his pain and allowing him to eat, smile, and reconnect socially.

His story illustrates the stakes of civil legal services: without legal advocacy, thousands of New Yorkers would continue to suffer needlessly under outdated rules.

Legal Aid also sounded the alarm on new threats from H.R.1, federal legislation signed into law in July, which slashes \$1 trillion from Medicaid over the next decade — the largest cut in the program's history. Albany estimates that as many as 1.5 million New Yorkers could lose coverage because of harsh work requirements and burdensome renewal rules.

In its testimony, Legal Aid emphasized that these cuts will put even more pressure on the health care system and make legal help all the more essential for people fighting to keep the coverage and care they need.

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The Legal Aid Society is a nonprofit organization that 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.

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