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

## ***The Legal Aid Society Marks 150 Years of Advancing Justice in New York City***

*Landmark anniversary to be honored with a new exhibit at The New York Historical and a year of citywide celebrations*

**(NEW YORK, NY)** — **The Legal Aid Society** proudly marks 150 years of protecting, defending, and advancing the rights of New Yorkers, a historic milestone for the nation’s oldest and largest public defense and civil legal services organization. Since its founding in 1876, Legal Aid has been the city’s premier nonprofit law firm, standing as a pillar of justice in New York City — representing immigrants seeking safety, safeguarding children and reuniting families, protecting people’s homes and livelihoods, and defending those accused of crimes who cannot afford to hire an attorney.

For a century and a half, Legal Aid has been on the front lines of the city’s most defining struggles for fairness and dignity, shaping laws, influencing public policy, and expanding access to justice for generations of vulnerable communities. Our 150th anniversary theme, “Reimagine Justice,” honors our historic legacy while boldly charting the future of justice in New York.

### **A Landmark Exhibit Honoring a Legacy of Justice**

To commemorate this milestone, The New York Historical will host an exhibit, “[\*Delivering Justice: 150 Years of The Legal Aid Society\*](#),” starting March 6 through July 5, 2026. The exhibit traces how Legal Aid’s work has helped shape New York City’s legal and social landscape, featuring never-before-seen photographs, press clippings, and original documents spanning from 1876 through the mid-20th century.

Drawing from rare archival materials and historical objects, the exhibit explores Legal Aid’s lasting impact across immigration, housing, policing, juvenile and prisoners’ rights, and civil legal advocacy. It highlights the organization’s enduring role as a first responder to injustice in New York City for 150 years.

The exhibit will also feature original works by contemporary artist Josh MacPhee alongside art created by young clients of The Legal Aid Society, in dialogue with reproduced works by Ben Shahn, Romare Bearden, Arnold de Mille, and Jacob Lawrence — underscoring the deep connection between art, justice, and social change.

On March 18, in connection with the exhibit, The New York Historical will also host a special [panel discussion](#) exploring the evolution of legal and justice issues in New York City dating back to the late 1800s. Panelists — including current Corporation Counsel and former Legal Aid Attorney-in-Chief and CEO, Steven Banks; Legal Aid’s current Attorney-in-Chief and CEO, Twyla Carter; and Bekah Friedman, historian and Legal Aid expert —

will explore New York City’s history and how past legal battles still shape today’s fights for fairness and accountability.

### **A Year of Community Celebration**

The 150th anniversary will also be celebrated citywide through a series of “Community Joy” events in every borough. Legal Aid will partner with beloved cultural institutions and community partners, including BRIC Arts Media, Brooklyn Org, Brooklyn Book Bodega, El Museo del Barrio, the Queens Museum, Rooftop Films, Snug Harbor, and others to build community resilience and strengthen community connections, while honoring the people at the heart of its mission.

The organization will also launch a dynamic public awareness campaign across the MTA system, featuring the voices and stories of Legal Aid staff, advocates, and the people and communities we serve.

“For 150 years, The Legal Aid Society has stood in the gap of injustice with courage, compassion, and an unshakable belief that justice belongs to everyone,” said **Twyla Carter, Attorney-in-Chief and CEO of The Legal Aid Society**. “Our history is a testament to the strength of the communities we serve — people who have challenged injustice, reshaped the law, and expanded opportunities for generations to come. As we honor this milestone, we do so under a unifying theme, “Reimagine Justice,” a call to carry our legacy forward. We are inspired not only by how far we’ve come, but by what’s still possible when we continue building a more fair, humane, and inclusive city together.”

### **Background**

Founded in 1876 as the German Legal Aid Society, the organization is the nation’s oldest and largest public defense and civil legal services organization dedicated to serving low-income individuals who otherwise had no access to a lawyer. In its first year, Legal Aid handled 212 cases, primarily assisting German immigrants in New York City — laying the foundation for what would become an enduring movement for equal justice.

As New York City grew and evolved, so did The Legal Aid Society. For 150 years, the organization has adapted to serve new communities while driving systemic reforms to meet the changing needs of low-income New Yorkers.

Today, Legal Aid’s work benefits more than 2 million low-income individuals, families, and households across the five boroughs facing challenges related to the criminal, civil, and juvenile legal systems, housing instability, immigration, employment, healthcare, education, government benefits, and more every year.

Through impact litigation, direct representation, and policy advocacy, The Legal Aid Society fights not only for impacted people, but also for lasting structural change that expands rights, protections, and opportunities for all New Yorkers.

From its defense of incarcerated people during the Attica Uprising, to its role in the landmark Willowbrook State School litigation, to decades of advocacy for unhoused families and people detained at Rikers Island, Legal Aid’s history is deeply intertwined with the defining civil rights struggles of New York City.

For 150 years — and counting — The Legal Aid Society has been, and remains, a powerful force for justice.

### ***Calendar of Events***

- **March 6:** [\*Delivering Justice: 150 Years of The Legal Aid Society\*](#) opens at The New York Historical
- **March 18:** 6:30 p.m. - [\*Justice For All: 150 Years of Legal Aid in New York\*](#) live talk at The New York Historical
- **April 11:** 11-3 p.m. - *Community Joy Family Day + Forum at BRIC House*

Celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Legal Aid Society, presented in partnership with BRIC Arts Media, Brooklyn Org, Brooklyn Book Bodega and Brooklyn

- **June 3:** The New York Liberty honor Legal Aid Society as non-profit of the game
- **June 12:** Staten Island Ferry Hawks honors The Legal Aid Society as “Harbor Hero”
- **July 23:** 6-9 p.m. - Join El Museo del Barrio and The Legal Aid Society at *Uptown Bounce*—an annual, free summer celebration featuring music, art-making, and community activities, plus access to *Double Exposures*, the first museum survey dedicated to the groundbreaking photographer Sophie Rivera (1938–2021).
- **September 3:** Free community film screening presented by Legal Aid and Rooftop Films at Snug Harbor
- **September 26:** 1-4 p.m. - *Community Joy Family Day* at the Queens Museum

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*The Legal Aid Society is a nonprofit law firm 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 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 the people we serve and helps improve our communities.*

[www.legalaidnyc.org](http://www.legalaidnyc.org)