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Contact:

The Legal Aid Society, [press@legal-aid.org](mailto:press@legal-aid.org)  
New York County Defender Services, [LToddMedina@nycds.org](mailto:LToddMedina@nycds.org)  
The Bronx Defenders, [media@bronxdefenders.org](mailto:media@bronxdefenders.org)  
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, [pbasak@ndsny.org](mailto:pbasak@ndsny.org)  
Brooklyn Defender Services, [amukarjiconnolly@bds.org](mailto:amukarjiconnolly@bds.org)

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

## ***NYC Public Defenders Join National Day of Action Calling for Increased Funding and Reduced Workloads***

**(NEW YORK, NY) — The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, The Bronx Defenders, and New York County Defender Services** issued the following statement on today’s national Day of Action for Public Defense, in response to San Francisco Chief Public Defender Mano Raju — who was recently held in contempt and fined \$26,000 for refusing to accept additional felony cases one day a week — and calling for urgent investment in public defense:

“Today, we join public defenders across the country to sound the alarm: the constitutional right to counsel is being systematically dismantled.

“What happened in San Francisco is a warning to all of us. When a public defender is punished for refusing to take on workloads that make effective representation impossible, it sends a chilling message — that the system values speed over justice, and appearances over constitutional rights. No attorney can provide meaningful representation when stretched beyond capacity, and no court system committed to the rule of law should demand it.

“Here in New York City, we see the same structural inequities every day. Public defenders are paid significantly less than other system stakeholders, even as we shoulder the responsibility of protecting the fundamental rights of people facing the loss of their liberty. Chronic underinvestment, combined with the erosion of defender independence, has led to staffing shortages, high attrition, and workloads that make it increasingly difficult to provide the representation the Constitution requires.

“These conditions do not just impact public defenders — they undermine fairness, weaken the integrity of our courts, and threaten the rule of law itself.

“Despite these challenges, we remain committed to the New Yorkers and communities we serve. But commitment alone cannot sustain a system that is fundamentally under-resourced.

“On this day of action, we wear black to mark a constitutional breaking point and to make clear that the right to counsel must be more than a promise on paper. It must be backed by the funding, independence, and support necessary to make it real.

“We call on our government funders, both in Albany and at City Hall, to address longstanding pay disparities, invest in hiring and retaining public defense staff, and ensure that caseloads are consistent with national standards for effective representation. A fair and functioning legal system depends on strong public defense, which is rooted in the U.S. Constitution. Our staff, the low-income New Yorkers we represent, and the integrity of our courts depend on it.”

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