

NEW YORK, NY (March 8, 2023) - Legal Services NYC, The Legal Aid Society, New York County Defender Services, Brooklyn Defender Services, The Bronx Defenders, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, Queens Defenders, Mobilization for Justice, New York Legal Assistance Group, Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A, Urban Justice Center, NMIC and CAMBA Legal Services, TakeRoot Justice released the following joint statement in response to City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams's State of the City address remarks on funding for public defender and civil legal services organizations:

"We applaud Speaker Adrienne Adams for addressing the dire funding crisis plaguing New York City's public defender and civil legal services organizations in her State of the City address.

"For years, our funding needs have largely been ignored, and now we're faced with widespread staff attrition and mounting operational costs that threaten our ability to deliver the robust legal representation that millions of New Yorkers rely on each year.

"We are talking about New Yorkers who face houselessness, food insecurity, joblessness, incarceration, racist policing, family separation, and deportation. We are talking about New Yorkers most impacted by the pandemic, by poverty, and other crises affecting the city.

"When we are underfunded, it doesn't just affect us, but the legal rights of every New Yorker. Because of this, we have successfully fought for years to expand legal counsel and support services to people beyond the legal system, to prevent system involvement in the first place.

"This is progress that the City likes to tout as indicative of our national leadership, but the chronic failure year after year to correct an arduous contracting process that plagues countless nonprofits throughout New York creates major cash flow challenges that make it near impossible to meet payroll, purchase critical services or pay vendors on time, resulting in late fees and higher vendor prices and disqualifying us from lines of credit.

"The City must establish new contract protocols that allow automatic payments without arduous vouchering procedures and faster contract registration once the City budget is approved.

"A budget is a reflection of values, and we hope that the adopted budget in June addresses both our lack of funding and the City's contracting policies. Anything short of this outcome will have catastrophic consequences for the New Yorkers we serve."

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