

Network of statewide nonprofits needs \$20 million in the State budget or will be forced to shut down free legal and housing services that prevent foreclosure and displacement

**ALBANY, N.Y., Feb. 11, 2020** -- Today, NYS Assembly Judiciary Committee Chair Jeffrey Dinowitz, Assembly Housing Committee Chair Steven Cymbrowitz, the Center for NYC Neighborhoods, Empire Justice Center, AARP, Western New York Law Center, Legal Services NYC, and advocates, nonprofits, and homeowners from across New York State launched a campaign to save the Homeowner Protection Program (HOPP). The coalition is asking state lawmakers to continue with critical funding -- \$20 million -- to a network of nonprofits that provide free assistance to vulnerable New Yorkers who are fighting mortgage fraud, predatory scams, and foreclosures. The funding will go toward vital financial counseling and legal services programs that will otherwise be forced to shut down. They are also asking for the funding to become permanent.

Over the last decade, the HOPP network of housing counseling and legal service providers have helped more than 100,000 families -- primarily seniors, people of color, and low- and moderate-income families -- across the state navigate complex housing challenges. That funding runs out on March 31, 2020, and will force many organizations to end services and lay off workers unless lawmakers appropriate the necessary funding. Some nonprofits have already shut down HOPP services due to funding uncertainty.

**Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (D-Bronx), Chair of the Assembly Judiciary Committee**, said: "Keeping people in their homes must continue to be a top priority in New York State, and the Homeowner Protection Program is an integral part of that effort. This network of civil legal service providers must be maintained, and frankly ought to be expanded, so that New Yorkers everywhere can defend themselves against fraud and predatory lending practices. I support the inclusion of \$20 million in this year's budget to keep supporting these important non-profit service providers and their effort to bring free legal and housing services that prevent foreclosure and displacement."

"Families facing the threat of foreclosure cannot navigate this process on their own, nor should they be expected to. The network we have in place has made New York a leader in foreclosure prevention, and this network must be given the funds it needs to allow it to continue" said **Assemblyman Steven Cymbrowitz (D-Brooklyn), Chair of the Assembly's Housing Committee**. "Safe and secure housing, and the ability to remain in that housing, is very much tied to workforce availability, vibrancy of our communities, and is an essential step in the path to the American dream."

"After my bank refused to assist me I fell prey to a mortgage foreclosure scam advertised on late night TV," said **homeowner Carol Kerber of Watervliet, N.Y.** "Because of HOPP funding for its foreclosure prevention program, The Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York (LASNNY) was able to secure a loan modification that kept me in my beloved home, and recover the majority of the \$7,000 that I was swindled out of due to a foreclosure scam."

HOPP funding for Brooklyn Legal Services (BLS) also helped homeowner Toyin Adekoya resolve a bank error that nearly forced her out of her home. "If it wasn't for Brooklyn Legal Services, my family and I might still be stuck in limbo, not knowing whether we would be able to keep our home of over 20 years. I think it's imperative for New York State to keep funding foreclosure prevention services. Without help from these advocates, homeowners like me will be in the dark not knowing where to turn to save our homes."

Without dedicated funding in the executive budget, New Yorkers' access to these programs will be drastically reduced. New York State's foreclosure prevention program capacity will nearly disappear overnight, and elected officials will have nowhere to refer constituents for free assistance -- making desperate homeowners more likely to turn to scammers who promise a quick solution. The statewide hotline and intake for homeowners will be shut down, cutting off a critical lifeline to New York families.

If these programs are not maintained, homeowners will lose access to free legal assistance in navigating the complex judicial foreclosure and loss mitigation process, putting them at higher risk of losing their homes.

**AARP New York volunteer Geneva Conway of North Albany**: "Older adults who have invested much of their life savings building equity in their homes can be particularly vulnerable to foreclosure, deed theft, and reverse mortgage issues. New Yorkers of color have been targeted in many cases by property consultant scammers and perpetrators of deed theft. The state has rightly funded housing and legal services for over a decade, helping more than 100,000 New Yorkers keep their homes and helping to keep neighborhoods strong. This year and future years should be no different. AARP urges the Governor and state lawmakers to restore \$20 million to the final budget."

"The no-cost legal and counseling services offered under HOPP are the first line of defense for New York's working families against every kind of mortgage and deed theft scam. HOPP helps families get their home or money back, and serves as the backbone for a dozen strong consumer protection laws that would be rendered meaningless without its network of advocates. Funding HOPP at \$20 million this year and every year is a commitment lawmakers must continue to make to New York's working families." said **Kirsten Keefe, Senior Attorney at Empire Justice Center**.

"New York's struggling homeowners and its groundbreaking consumer protections for those at risk of foreclosure are dependent on the HOPP network of housing counseling and legal services agencies presently-threatened with extinction unless funding is restored in the budget," said **Jacob Inwald, Director of Foreclosure Prevention at Legal Services NYC**. "The single most important tool in New York's arsenal against deed theft and other real estate scams targeting primarily the elderly and communities of color is the HOPP network—without it, the only help available to distressed homeowners are scammers preying on the vulnerable. Permanent funding of this network, which has given New York State a remarkable return on its investment, is vital if New York is serious about preserving affordable homeownership and stabilizing communities."

"Every day, New Yorkers face housing struggles. Predatory scammers targeting vulnerable seniors, families falling into foreclosure after loss of a job, and so much more. The free housing and legal services provided by HOPP have been a critical lifeline for 100,000 New Yorkers over the last decade and our low- and middle-income families will be at a severe disadvantage trying to navigate these challenges on their own. It is crucial that state lawmakers allocate \$20 million in funding and make it a permanent item in the budget for the long-term health of our communities," said **Christie Peale, CEO/Executive Director of the Center for NYC Neighborhoods**.

For additional information, please visit [FundHOPP.org](http://FundHOPP.org).

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