The Statewide Campaign for Civil Legal Services – made up of several dozen organizations that provide free civil legal services to the poor from around the State, including Legal Services NYC – today applauded Governor David Paterson’s amendment to include $1 million in general state appropriations to fund civil legal services in the 2009-10 budget, while cautioning that much more needs to be done to meet increased demand for legal services for those hardest hit by the current economic crisis.

Full press release follows:

STATEWIDE CAMPAIGN FOR CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

January 20, 2009

CONTACT:

Anne Erickson, 518-462-6831 x 103
Andrew Scherer, 646-442-3606
Steven Banks, 212-577-3277
Deborah Wright, 212-343-0708
Christopher Lamb, 212-417-3766

STATEWIDE CAMPAIGN FOR CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES APPLAUDS GOVERNOR PATERSON FOR AMENDING BUDGET TO INCLUDE $1 MILLION IN FUNDING FOR CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES

The Statewide Campaign for Civil Legal Services – made up of several dozen organizations that provide free civil legal services to the poor from around the State – today applauded Governor David Paterson’s amendment to include $1 million in general state appropriations to fund civil legal services in the 2009-10 budget, while cautioning that much more needs to be done to meet increased demand for legal services for those hardest hit by the current economic crisis.

Supporters of civil legal services programs statewide had appealed to the Governor to amend his original 2009-10 budget, which did not include any general appropriation to fund the delivery of civil legal services to the poor. The $1 million added to the budget for legal services was part of only $1.35 million in changes made by the Administration following the 30-day amendment process.

"While the addition of $1 million state wide for civil legal services for the poor is not a significant amount of money relative to the dramatically increased need for assistance, this budget modification makes a very important statement about the importance of civil legal services in this time of economic hardship. We hope this is a signal that the governor will now work with the legislature to restore full funding for civil legal services in the coming budget. We recognize the severe impact of the current economic crisis on the state budget, but this is no time to abandon New York’s all-too-modest commitment to providing access to justice for those most in need," said Andrew Scherer, Legal Services NYC Executive Director and President.

"We appreciate the Governor’s decision to restore $1 million in state-wide funding for civil legal services, and we will continue to work with the Governor’s office and the Legislature to secure a full restoration of funding at this crucial time in the midst of the severe economic downturn when out of work and other low income New Yorkers need legal aid to avert evictions and foreclosures and to secure subsistence level benefits like food stamps, disability payments, unemployment insurance, and health care coverage," said Steven Banks, Attorney-in-Chief of the Legal Aid Society in New York City.

"We look forward to working with the new Senate Majority and with the Assembly Majority which has led the way on these critical issues for years," said Anne Erickson, president of the Empire Justice Center, speaking on behalf of the Legal Services Funding Alliance, a coalition of the 20 legal services organizations outside New York City. "We applaud the Governor’s 30 day amendment and will continue to work with the administration and the Legislature to restore state funding in the final budget to at least $11.4 million, 75% of the $16 million in the 2007-08 budget. As it stands, New York State’s support for civil legal services has fallen to one of the lowest levels in the country."

"The Governor’s restoration of $1m for civil legal services funding is a welcome, albeit small, reprieve for crises stricken legal services offices," said Kenneth Rosenfeld, Director of Legal Services for Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp. and representative of LEAP, a
coalition of 10 NYC providers. “Even with this restoration, New York State remains one of the least supportive states in the country in its per capita funding for client services at civil justice offices. Without an executive branch home for legal services and the ongoing insufficiency of funding support, New York’s working poor and poor people are having an increasingly difficult time accessing justice and legal services lawyers to assist them.”

###

See coverage in the January 21st *New York Law Journal.*