

January 8, 2024

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

NYC Public Defenders Release 2024 Statewide Criminal Legal System Legislative Priorities

Measures Include Increased Funding for Public Defender Offices, Passage of the Treatment Not Jail Act, the Youth Justice & Opportunities Act and the Eliminating Mandatory Minimums Act, Along With Additional Key Reforms

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, The Bronx Defenders, New York County Defender Services, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem and Queens Defenders released their [2024 New York State legislative priorities](#) today, calling on Albany to pass critical criminal justice reforms and begin to rectify the harm being caused by the harsh, unfair and deeply racially disparate criminal legal system.

The measures include continued funding for public defender offices statewide to assist with discovery obligations and staffing needs; passage of [HESC/DALF expansion](#) legislation to increase student loan assistance for lawyers serving the public interest; and the [Treatment Not Jail Act](#), which would dramatically expand pre-trial diversion for people with mental health or substance use concerns.

The defender offices also called on Albany to cease any further dangerous [rollbacks to bail laws](#) that have contributed to an increased pre-trial detention population that disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx New Yorkers and those who cannot afford the amount of cash bail imposed on their freedom.

Additional legislative priorities include the [Second Look Act](#) which allows judges to review and reconsider excessive sentences; the [Jury of Our Peers Act](#) to repeal New York's lifetime categorical ban on people with felony convictions from serving on juries; the [Challenging Wrongful Convictions Act](#) to ensure that wrongfully convicted New Yorkers have a pathway to exoneration; the [#Right2RemainSilent](#) legislation to ensure that all youth under the age of 18 have access to an attorney prior to a police interrogation; the [No Slavery in NY Act](#) to abolish the prison labor exception that allows for modern-day slavery for people incarcerated in New York's prisons and jails; the [Youth Justice & Opportunities Act](#) to expand alternatives to incarceration and record sealing for adolescents and young adults; and an increase in funding for community-based treatment programs and violence intervention programs to enhance community safety.

“Building on the critical criminal legal system reforms enacted in recent years, Albany must act on these proposals to ensure that public defender offices are fully funded and that our clients are afforded alternatives to incarceration and resources to address mental health and substance use concerns,” said **Tina Luongo, Chief Attorney of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “This includes passage of the Treatment Not Jail Act, Communities Not Cages platform and other measures that have garnered widespread support. We look forward to working with the Governor and Legislature to see these bills into law.”

“Despite the incredible progress made in recent years, we still have a long way to go before we can undo the damage wrought by decades of mass incarceration on New York's families and communities, especially in the Bronx,” said **Wesley Caines, Interim Executive Director of The Bronx Defenders**. “This year, that requires overhauling New York's draconian sentencing laws through the Communities Not Cages package; investing in programs that create true community safety and healing, like Treatment Not Jail; and fully funding public defender offices to support every New Yorker in need. We stand ready to work with the Governor and Legislature to continue our forward progress while ensuring past reforms are faithfully executed.”

“The criminal legal system inflicts a myriad of harms on New Yorkers from the trauma of arrest and incarceration to lasting barriers to housing, education and employment that punish people throughout their lives,” said **Lisa Schreibersdorf, Executive Director of Brooklyn Defender Services**. “While Albany has made progress to address these harms, much more must be done— from breaking down these barriers for young people with the Youth Justice & Opportunities Act to ending mandatory minimum sentencing and predatory court fees. As the new session begins, we urge the legislature and governor to embrace these proposals, ensure public defense is fully funded, and prioritize community-based resources over incarceration.”

“New York has made great strides in recent years, but our criminal legal system remains fundamentally broken,” said **Stan Germán, Executive Director of the New York County Defender Services**. “We continue to over-police, over-prosecute, and over-incarcerate people of color, young people, and those who suffer from underlying mental health and substance use issues. Our jails and prisons, which serve as our de facto mental health institutions, are wastelands of horrific abuse and despair. With the legislative priorities outlined here, like the Treatment Not Jail Act and the Communities Not Cages sentencing reforms, among many others, our elected leaders have the opportunity to make our system substantially more fair and humane, and make our communities healthier and safer in the process.”

“As public defenders on the frontlines of New York's criminal legal system, we have unique insights not only into the myriad challenges our clients face but also into the solutions that will make New York safer and more equitable for all,” said **Alice Fontier, Managing Director of Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem**. “We appreciate the reforms that have already been passed by the Legislature and we look forward to working with lawmakers and Gov. Hochul in 2024 to undo the damages of a criminal legal system that continues to disproportionately – and negatively – impact Black and Latinx New Yorkers.”

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