



THE LEGISLATURE
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

March 26, 2021

Speaker Carl E. Heastie
New York State Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 932
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Speaker Heastie,

We write to urge inclusion of the following budget request in New York's final fiscal plan for FY 2021-22, which reflects the shared unmet legal assistance needs of our collective districts.

As you know, Upstate New York's four major cities, Albany, Rochester, Syracuse, and Buffalo, have had a number of issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. One important community resource that has been on the frontline, assisting our constituents and communities navigate these difficult times has been the civil legal service providers. They offer critical intervention, guidance, and legal counsel to prevent an economic or medical hardship from becoming long-term systemic poverty.

Moreover, the research has illustrated that investing in civil legal services saves New York State money. For every \$1 the State invests into these vital programs, \$10 in economic benefit is generated through decreased court, social services, and other system costs. Investment in civil legal services programs also assists people to stay in their homes, saves taxpayers money, and helps to stimulate the NYS economy. However, prior to the pandemic, the Office of Court Administration (OCA) estimated that 63 percent of the civil legal needs of low-income New Yorkers were unmet. Sadly, the demand for civil legal services has only grown over the past year. Therefore, it is imperative we act to support the increased need for these critical legal services in Upstate communities.

We respectfully request the final budget agreement includes \$6 million in funding for not-for-profit legal aid service providers, as proposed in the Senate one house Aid to Localities budget bill (see attached language). While each of the Upstate metropolitan areas are different, the communal needs are apparent and similar: housing, domestic violence, access to food, childcare, and healthcare, among others.

This \$6 million in funding would be dedicated to these important programs in Upstate New York:

- **Capital Region** - \$1.5 million to the Family Stabilization Project for Northeastern New York. Funding for this program will help meet an overwhelming need for direct legal services in the Albany area, which sees the largest demand for services regarding housing, family, domestic violence, and income/benefit denials.

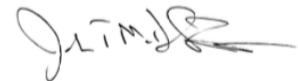
- **Syracuse** - \$1.5 million to the Family Stabilization and Well-Being Project of Central New York. Funding this program will help stabilize working families in Central New York through legal assistance to help low-income individuals in the Syracuse area retain housing, unemployment, food benefits, childcare, and Medicaid benefits.
- **Rochester** - \$1.5 million to the Tenant Defense Project of Greater Rochester in New York. Funding for this program will provide direct services to tenants and impact litigation and advocacy support. The Project provides services for tenants as well as provides expertise in the fields of public benefits, family, consumer, elder, health, and immigration law.
- **Buffalo** - \$1.5 million to support the Economic Stabilization Program for WNY Families. Funding for this program will help families address problems with financial well-being advocacy (unemployment benefits, bankruptcy, and child support), reentry services (family stability and employability), and immigration status assistance.

We thank you in advance for your support for civil legal assistance programs in Upstate New York. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Very truly yours,



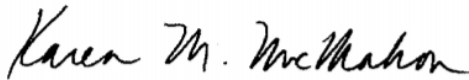
Patricia Fahy, 109th District



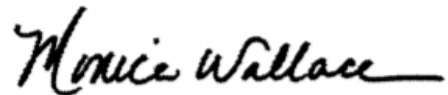
John McDonald, 108th District

cc: Blake Washington, Secretary, NYS Assembly Ways & Means Committee
Andrea Stewart-Cousins, NYS Senate Majority Leader
Carl E. Heastie, NYS Assembly Speaker

The following Majority Members join us in this request:



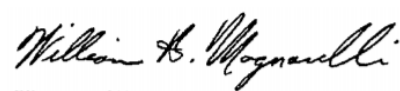
Karen McMahon, 146th District



Monica Wallace, 143rd District



Harry Bronson, 138th District



William Magnarelli, 129th District

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Clark".

Sarah Clark, 136th District

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Meeks".

Demond Meeks, 137th District

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carrie WZ".

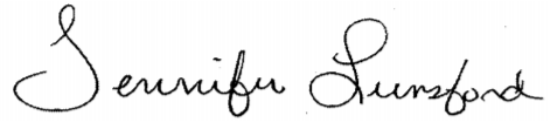
Carrie Woerner, 113th District

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Albert Stirpe, 127th District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Phil Steck".

Phil Steck, 110th District

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Lunsford".

Jennifer Lunsford, 135th District

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Rivera".

Jonathan Rivera, 149th District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pamela J. Hutner".

Pamela Hutner, 128th District