



**Testimony submitted on behalf of**

**Legal Services Access Alliance**

**Presented by**

**Erica Ludwick, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York**

**Testimony Presented to**

**New York State Senate Finance Committee**

**and**

**Assembly Ways and Means Committee**

**2023 Joint Budget Hearing on Housing**

**Wednesday, March 1, 2023**

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Submitted by:

Legal Services Access Alliance

237 Main Street, Suite 400

Buffalo, NY 14203

Good morning Senator Krueger and Assemblymember Weinstein, Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Rosenthal, and the other participants here today. My name is Erica Ludwick and I am a Deputy Director of the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York (LASNNY). Our Executive Director at LASNNY is Nic Rangel, and we are board members of the Legal Services Access Alliance.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding Governor Hochul's Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Executive Budget as it pertains to housing stability.

We are grateful for Governor Hochul's continued support of \$35 million in funding for the legal representation for eviction services program. This initiative provides legal services and representation for eviction cases outside of New York City. As you may recall, this program was previously created by the Governor and the Legislature during the COVID pandemic, during which it provided essential services in what for many was an extremely challenging time. While we can all be happy that the pandemic has shifted to an endemic, unfortunately the need for eviction legal services has not diminished.

This program and support has been critical to assisting struggling New Yorkers since it was created. This funding was distributed based on poverty population to six (6) federally funded Legal Services Corporation (LSC) organizations that are federally mandated to cover each county in the state, to efficiently assist every corner of the state outside of NYC. Additionally, each program subcontracted with other legal service provider organizations to ensure representation of undocumented tenants and others. We have prioritized representation in underserved areas including City, Town and Village Courts in our rural counties, and all other underserved tenants.

With this state support, the Alliance members have helped countless individuals navigate through their eviction crisis. In doing this work, we also learned that we can do things better and more effectively if we invest in the needed technology and resources and develop best practices to provide these needed legal services throughout the State. The Alliance has begun to collaboratively develop a statewide intake portal to ease access to representation for tenants. We have also partnered to create a toll-free hotline that tenants can call to be directed to the appropriate legal services provider in their area. Additionally, the Alliance is working to develop their partnerships with local law schools to recruit and train new lawyers, which will help to create a diverse and robust pipeline of civil legal service providers in New York.

There is much more work to be done and the Alliance and their subcontracting partners look forward to working with the NYS Legislature, Governor Hochul and the Office for Temporary and Disability Assistance to build out this initiative even more in the future. ***We ask for your continued support of \$35 million for the legal representation for eviction services initiative in the 2023-24 enacted NYS budget.***

In addition, while we are grateful and supportive of Governor Hochul's budget proposals to address the housing crisis and build additional housing stock and supports, we were disappointed to see that the Homeowners Protection Program (HOPP) was not included in the Executive budget. ***We respectfully request the Legislature's support for a full restoration and increase of \$40 million for the Homeowners Protection Program (HOPP) in the enacted budget.***

Thank you again for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.