

# TAKEROOT JUSTICE

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 12, 2026

Written Testimony  
by Keriann Pauls on behalf of TakeRoot Justice

PRESENTED TO THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE AND THE  
ASSEMBLY WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE

JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING ON PUBLIC PROTECTION

To Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways & Means Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for your consideration.

My name is Keriann Pauls and I am the Interim Executive Director at TakeRoot Justice (<https://takerootjustice.org/>). Our organization and talented staff provide legal, participatory research, and policy support to strengthen the work of grassroots and community-based groups in New York City to dismantle racial, economic, and social oppression.

TakeRoot is a proud member of the New York Legal Services Coalition and shares all the priorities that they highlight in their spoken and written testimony.

## **Full \$102.5 Million for IOLA Funding**

I write separately to amplify the call for the Governor's Executive Budget to include full appropriation authority for the Interest on Lawyer Account (IOLA) Fund. The Executive budget included \$77.5 million, far short of the \$102.5 million IOLA requested, and was approved by IOLA's Board of Trustees.

IOLA is a critical, non-taxpayer funding source for civil legal services for low-income New Yorkers. This funding is not taxpayer money; it is generated through interest on attorney escrow accounts for the sole purpose of supporting civil legal services statewide as prescribed in statute. The full amount of money needed is currently in IOLA's accounts.

IOLA is now entering the second year of a five-year, competitively bid contract process that was designed specifically to provide stability and predictability for civil legal services providers. It

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includes built-in increases each fiscal year to account for the constant increase in costs to cover our programmatic and operating expenses.

Over the past year, providers have also worked closely with IOLA to plan and implement critical infrastructure investments through the Justice Infrastructure Project. These efforts are intended to create long-term efficiencies and improve service quality, including the recently announced statewide civil legal services training center and a planned online intake portal that will expand access and streamline assistance for New Yorkers seeking help. Civil legal services providers are essential partners in implementing the Governor's own budget priorities, including protecting immigrants' rights and helping New Yorkers navigate economic hardship

Without the additional \$25 million needed to fully fund IOLA's request, there will be significant cuts in funding starting April 1, 2026, when year two contracts begin. Those reductions will mean the loss of jobs, fewer services for vulnerable communities, and the potential unraveling of carefully planned investments that were intended to strengthen the civil legal services system for the long term—directly undermining the policy goals this budget seeks to advance.

We call on the Governor to correct the mistake of underbudgeting the IOLA line to restore it to \$102.5 million. However, if the Governor does not make this correction within the 30 days, we respectfully ask the legislature to include \$102.5 million spending authority for IOLA in their one house bills.

## **\$179 Million for Judiciary Civil Legal Services Funding**

TakeRoot justice also respectfully asks for the legislature to adopt the Office of Court Administration's proposed SFY 2027 Judiciary budget, which includes a \$25 million increase and a 3 percent cost-of-living adjustment, for a total of \$179 million in Judiciary civil legal services funding. This funding must remain flexible, allowing providers to respond to rapidly changing community needs, including housing instability, domestic violence, and the continued strain on low-income households.

## **Closing**

Again, TakeRoot supports and signs on to all the New York Legal Services Coalition priorities before this committee and thank you for your serious consideration of these requests.