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2021 State Budget: A Solid Budget That Signals a More Fair and Equitable New York During Pandemic Recovery

"This is a solid budget for the crucial Pandemic recovery period that signals a more fair and equitable New York. It accomplishes a great deal under difficult circumstances and took principled compromise and hard work from the Legislature and the Governor to make it happen. Many provisions in the budget such as taxing very-high income earners, paying back rent and utilities, a fund for excluded workers, and eliminating premiums for Essential Plan coverage will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on the lives of low-income New Yorkers," said **Kristin Brown**, President and CEO of Empire Justice Center.

As a public interest law firm and advocates for low-income New Yorkers, Empire Justice Center worked hard with colleagues, legislators, and the Governor's office to include the following provisions:

Ending Liens on Homes of Public Assistance Recipients

Until this budget bill, New York was the [last state in the nation](#) to require homeowners to give a mortgage on their homes in exchange for receiving welfare benefits, [perpetuating a cycle of poverty](#) and preventing very low-income people from achieving economic stability and security for decades. We thank the Governor, Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senators Roxanne Persaud and Liz Krueger, Speaker Carl Heastie, Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal, and Central Staff including Tamara Frazier and Jennifer Sacco for working so diligently to make lives better for low-income New Yorkers.

Expanding Access to Childcare

Expanding pre-kindergarten programs and capping co-pays at 10% of family income above the poverty level is long overdue. This change will serve as a foundation for children in low-income families to achieve lifelong success. As an organization that has [spent over a decade on these policy changes](#), we are gratified to see it finally happen. We thank the Governor, Children and Families Committee Chairs Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi and Senator Jabari Brisport and

their staff, including Alexa Arcchi and James Ostazewski for making New York a national leader in establishing affordable child care for working families.

Funding Immigration Legal Services

Immigrant New Yorkers are among those who have been at the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic, often risking exposure and deportation in order to take care of loved ones and work in essential jobs. This budget provides level funding for the **Liberty Defense Project**, which provides legal services to immigrant New Yorkers, and recognizes the need for legal representation for immigrants facing unlawful detention, removal, and who are victims of trafficking. We appreciate the Governor's office, Assembly woman Catalina Cruz, Judiciary Chairs Lavine and Hoylman, Finance and Ways and Means Chairs Krueger and Weinstein for their support, and New York Immigration Coalition and the Vera Institute for leading the advocacy efforts.

Funding Homeowner Protection Program (HOPP)

Mortgage delinquency rates in New York State are currently at numbers three times greater than the Great Recession. The NYS Office of the Attorney General's [Homeowner Protection Program \(HOPP\)](#) provides legal representation and housing counseling services to homeowners, especially those experiencing financial distress due to COVID-19. This budget recognizes the impact of the program for homeowners and communities and provides stable funding for up to three years. We commend the legislature, especially Housing Chairs Kavanagh and Cymbrowitz, Judiciary Chairs Lavine and Hoylman, Finance and Ways and Means Chairs Krueger and Weinstein, Leaders Peoples-Stokes, Stewart-Cousins, Assemblymembers Solages, Dinowitz, Senators Myrie, Ryan, Kennedy, and Speaker Heastie for championing the statewide program that serves as the first line of defense for homeowners facing foreclosures.

Funding for Disability Advocacy for Low Income New Yorkers (DAP)

The [Disability Advocacy Program \(DAP\)](#) provides representation for low-income New Yorkers who have been denied federal disability benefits, which is the sole source of income for many low-income families. This budget provides level funding and will allow continued representation for low-income people during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. We are grateful to Assemblymembers Gottfried and Rosenthal, Senators Persaud and Krueger, and the Governor for championing the program.

Funding for Community Health Advocates (CHA)

Navigating healthcare is one of the most complicated tasks any New Yorker can face. The [Community Health Advocates \(CHA\)](#) help all New Yorkers understand how to use and maximize their coverage, access needed services, reduce medical debts, and address unfair denials. We are very glad to see the budget providing for slightly higher than level funding this year, recognizing CHA's efficiency and contribution to New York's economy and consumers, during a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed health disparities and financial barriers across our communities. We thank the Governor's office, Chairs Gottfried and Rivera for championing these programs, and the Community Service Society for leading the advocacy effort.

Funding for Civil Legal Services (LSAF)

Civil legal services provide legal representation for low-income New Yorkers in life's essential needs such as safe housing, public benefits, and fighting discrimination. This year's budget provides level funding for longstanding civil legal services funding sources and has a special provision recognizing the acute need for legal services in Upstate counties. We appreciate Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Hoylman, Lavine, the entire Rochester delegation, particularly our new Senators Cooney and Brouk and Senator Sean Ryan for their efforts to not only stabilize funding for civil legal services through the **Legal Services Assistance Fund (LSAF)**, but also for advancing the legal rights of New Yorkers by increasing representation.

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To find out more about Empire Justice Center, visit our website, www.empirejustice.org. To learn more about our policy and legislative advocacy, follow our monthly newsletter, [Policy Matters](#).

Empire Justice Center is a statewide, multi-issue, multi-strategy, public interest law firm focused on changing the "systems" within which poor and low-income families live. Empire Justice protects and strengthens the legal rights of people in New York State who are poor, disabled or disenfranchised through: systems change advocacy, training and support to other advocates and organizations, and high quality direct civil legal representation. Empire Justice has offices in Albany, Rochester, Yonkers, White Plains and Central Islip on Long Island.