



Policy Matters – January 2024

Welcome to the January edition of our newsletter, **Policy Matters**. In this edition we cover what's in and what's missing in the Executive Budget, budget testimony on Public Protection and Health, and recognition for Empire Justice staff members.

Highlights from the Executive Budget

The Executive Budget has landed, and we are grateful that it includes funding for many crucial programs, including support for the state victim assistance programs through the Office of Victim Services, Disability Advocacy Program, Education Debt Consumer Assistance Program, and Community Health Advocates.

One striking omission in the Executive Budget is the Homeowner Protection Program (HOPP). This is especially notable, given the governor's focus on housing. We will be working with legislative champions to ensure that there is full funding of \$40 million in the final budget for services to help New York's struggling homeowners.

Additionally, Empire Justice is strongly opposed to the proposal in the Executive Budget to sweep \$100 million from the Interest on Lawyers Account (IOLA) to the general fund. IOLA funding, created for the sole purpose of funding civil legal service providers, supports essential

services that help low-income New Yorkers obtain help with civil legal problems affecting their most basic needs, such as food, shelter, jobs and access to health care, and it is a critical source of infrastructure dollars for the civil legal services community. These funds are accumulated for distribution at the next round of grants to civil legal services providers, which are intended to assist in addressing the dual crises of an estimated \$1 billion civil justice gap and the need to move toward pay equity between civil legal service organizations and other government funded attorneys. Civil legal services are more important than ever. We will be urging the Governor to rescind the sweep in her 30-day amendments and the Legislature to support the modest proposed increase.

The proposed IOLA sweep was a subject of much conversation at the Public Protection hearing on January 25th. You can [read](#) or [watch](#) President and CEO Kristin Brown’s testimony, as well as the [testimony](#) of Tina Monshipour Foster, Executive Director of JustCause and President of the Board of the New York Legal Services Coalition. [Assemblymember Dinowitz asked Judge Zayas about the sweep](#), calling it a “big mistake.” [Assemblymember Monica Wallace also thanked the Judge](#) for his support of returning the money, calling the sweep “penny wise and pound foolish.”

Call to action: Please join the [sign on letter](#) urging Governor Hochul to rescind the proposed transfer of \$100 million from the IOLA Fund to the State General Fund. If your organization endorses the letter, please email iolaf@iola.org with the subject line “Support for IOLA” and indicate in the body of the email exactly how you would like your name and/or organization to be listed on the letter.

Health Policy Update

In the Health hearing, our Health Team submitted [testimony](#) requesting continued funding for their important work in protecting and expanding care for the neediest New Yorkers. Among items covered in the testimony were: continuous coverage for children to age six who are covered by Medicaid or Child Health Plus; coverage for medications; support for those who receive home care services through the Consumer Directed Personal Care Program; expansion of the Essential Plan; and equity in the asset limit in Medicaid.

In addition to rallying health coverage, we’re also advocating for continued funding for the Community Health Advocates program, a statewide consumer assistance program that helps

New Yorkers navigate today's complex health care system by providing individual assistance, outreach, and education to communities.

Governor Hochul signed the Fair Medical Debt Reporting Act (S.4907 Rivera/A.6275 Paulin)! Here's [her announcement](#) and our [memo of support](#). Thanks to all the advocates for their work on this important issue!

Creating Assets, Savings, and Hope

[CASH](#) is open for the tax season! CASH (Creating Assets, Savings, and Hope) uses the tax return moment as an opportunity to connect clients with a wide variety of resources that can improve families' health and financial well-being. This season clients will take a brief eligibility pre-screening [survey](#) prior to making their appointment. After answering a handful of yes or no questions, eligible clients will be directed to our scheduling page to book their timeslot. Clients who are not eligible for our services will be directed to information about other options. Clients can now also download and print their required [forms](#) ahead of time. If you know of anyone who would benefit from CASH services, please help us spread the word!

Critical Childcare Bill Reintroduced

As readers of Policy Matters know from our advocacy last spring, we have been working in support of legislation to support childcare subsidies for parents who work irregular hours. When a parent or caretaker receives a subsidy for childcare, the grant is typically to correspond to the parent or caregiver's hours of work with a small amount of time added for transportation. However, when parents work irregular, split shifts or non-traditional hours, or if the parents or caregivers combine work with education and training, approvals are limited - the children's attendance is split into parts of days, resulting in disruption for the children and transportation difficulties for the parents. Legislation was passed in 2023, however, it was vetoed due to budgetary reasons at that time. We are excited to see that a new bill has been introduced (S.8152 Brisport/A.8878 Hevesi), and we look forward to working with other advocates on this.

In the Media

From our Benefits Team, Staff Attorney **Hailey Kulikowski** and Senior Attorney **Susan Antos** appeared on [Hudson Mohawk Magazine Sanctuary Radio](#) to discuss the dire need for an increase in the shelter allowance and basic needs allowance. The shelter allowance has not been updated since 1988 for households without children, and 2003 for those with children. The basic needs allowance was last updated in 2012 and helps low-income families pay for necessities such as transportation, clothing, and personal hygiene products. There is currently a bill in both houses of the legislature that would require shelter allowance to be set to at least

100% of the Fair Market Value rent for the local social service district (A.5543 Rosenthal/S.2982 Kavanagh).

Know your Rights

Anyone, regardless of gender, may experience control, threats, abuse, or violence from a current or former intimate partner. Studies indicate that transgender, gender non-conforming, and nonbinary (TGNCNB) people experience this type of abuse at similar or even higher rates, especially TGNC People of Color. However, many survivors from these communities are not aware of their rights when they need to access residential domestic violence program services.

Empire Justice Center has released a [Know Your Rights Guide](#) entitled *Opening Shelter Doors: A Guide to Shelter Access for Transgender, Gender Non-Conforming, and Nonbinary (TGNCNB) People*. This Guide is intended to help TGNCNB New Yorkers better understand what Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) may look like and what program resources are available for help. It also explores what their rights are if they are discriminated against or denied access to these services because of their gender identity or gender expression. The Guide is also available in [Spanish](#).

Fair Hearing Resource

As you may recall from our June 2023 Policy Matters, the Empire Justice Center, the Legal Aid Society, and the New York Legal Assistance Group in partnership with Columbia Law School's Lawyering in the Digital Age launched [Fair Hearing Help NY](#). A Fair Hearing is a chance for you to tell an Administrative Law Judge why you think a decision about your case made by a local social services agency is wrong. This is a free, virtual legal resource for welfare benefit hearings. **Zoe Raglow-DeFranco** and **Susan Antos** represented the Empire Justice Center on this project. We are thrilled to announce that our promotional flyer is now available in 9 languages (English, Spanish, French, Russian, Polish, Italian, Bengali, Traditional Chinese, Korean).

Congratulations Remla Parthasarathy!

Congratulations to Remla Parthasarathy, Managing Attorney, Crime Victims & Project Leader, Crime Victims Legal Network, for being recently elected to Office for Victim Services Advisory Council Co-President for 2024. Congratulations Remla for your well-deserved recognition! Former Office for Victim Services Director, **Elizabeth Cronin**, in her parting [newsletter](#), highlights and applauds the important work of the Remla, her team, and the Crime Victims Legal Network.

Thank You For Reading

Testimony at upcoming budget hearings will be on the Policy Central page, over social media, and in upcoming editions of Policy Matters.

If you'd like to keep up with our policy work, follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), or visit the [Policy Central](#) page on our website.

If you need civil legal help, you can find contact information for each of our offices [here](#).

Feel free to forward this to a friend.

The Empire Justice Policy Team