



**New York Legal Assistance Group
Testimony Presented to the New York State Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly
Ways & Means Committee**

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection

February 13, 2025

Thank you, Chair Krueger and Chair Pretlow for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection on behalf of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). NYLAG is a not-for-profit legal services organization serving low-income New Yorkers. NYLAG uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers experiencing poverty or in crisis combat economic, racial, and social injustice. We address emerging and urgent needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, financial empowerment, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community partnerships. We aim to disrupt systemic racism by serving clients, whose legal and financial crises are often rooted in racial inequality.

Low-income New Yorkers and vulnerable communities continue to face barriers in accessing civil legal services which are often needed to help navigate issues such as housing, benefits, access to healthcare, family stability, employment, and immigration. While investing in civil legal services has always been critical, with rapidly changing federal policies and uncertainties around federal funding, this investment becomes even more essential. As such, we are asking legislature to support the following in the SFY25-26 budget:

- Support \$150M proposed by the Office of Court Administration for Judiciary Civil Legal Services (JCLS).
- Add \$2.5M to the \$77.5M appropriation for the Interest on Lawyers Account (IOLA) and accept budget language that designates IOLA as a “fiduciary fund.”
- Support the Executive’s allocation of \$100M to cover Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) contracts through 2028 and support the \$20M reappropriation to cover current VOCA contracts.

Additionally, we are asking your support of several bills that will help protect our clients and preserve their rights:

- Access to Representation Act (S.141/A.270/)
- New York for All Act (S.2235/A.3506)
- Ensuring privacy in court-ordered name changes (S.2431/A.3925)

Respectfully submitted by Emily Ward, New York Legal Assistance Group