Senate Resolution No. 1818

BY: Senator MYRIE

COMMEMORATING the 50th Anniversary of the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize and pay tribute to those organizations of high purpose and worthy accomplishment whose endeavors have faithfully served the welfare of the citizens of the State of New York; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern, and in full accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York; and

WHEREAS, The Prisoners' Legal Services of New York, formed in 1976, is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2026 after five decades of service to the State of New York and its residents; and

WHEREAS, The Attica prison uprising in 1971, which began in response to inhumane living conditions and resulted in 39 deaths, led to statewide conversations to create a system to provide legal representation to incarcerated individuals in New York State; and

WHEREAS, After research and analysis into the facts of the Attica prison uprising, prisoners' rights clinics were formed throughout the State, including one at Albany Law School; and

WHEREAS, In late 1973, a committee was created to consider civil representation of prisoners; in 1974, the committee issued an in-depth Draft Proposal for the Provision of Legal Services to Indigent Inmates in New York State Correctional Facilities; and

WHEREAS, The 1974 report by the committee determined that despite all the existing legal services available to prisoners, inmates were still not provided enough legal assistance to make the court system accessible; the report proposed a comprehensive program initiated at the state level to improve court accessibility; and

WHEREAS, In response to the report, the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York opened in 1976 with over one million dollars in funding from the LEAA, which provided the means to hire staff and initiate operations; and

WHEREAS, Robert P. Patterson became the first chairman of the board and Pierce Gerety became the first executive director; together, they envisioned a statewide program, based in New York City, that would include six offices throughout the State; and

WHEREAS, Within its first year, the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York employed 35 attorneys and 10 legal assistants to service a prison population of roughly 16,000 individuals, creating a ratio of one lawyer

to every 450 prisoners; and

WHEREAS, In 1978, New York State Governor Hugh Carey and the New York State Legislature determined the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York should be a state-funded organization, and they provided one million dollars in the state budget to fund their operations; and

WHEREAS, Since its inception in 1976, the staff of the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York have worked tirelessly to fulfill its mission of providing high quality, effective legal representation and assistance to indigent prisoners; staff help prisoners secure their civil and human rights and advocate for more humane prisons and criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, As a result of stagnant budgets and budget cuts, the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York has had to reduce staff; the organization has 15 lawyers and New York's prison population is 31,600, creating a ratio of one attorney for every 2,106 prisoners; and

WHEREAS, Despite financial hardships and an overwhelming caseload, the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York continues to provide thousands of incarcerated New Yorkers the legal help they need; and

WHEREAS, The work of the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York helps prepare incarcerated individuals for reintegration into society by ensuring placement in vocational and educational programs, challenging unjust disciplinary hearings, obtaining medical and mental health treatment, advocating for family communication and visitation, and correcting jail time and sentencing errors; and

WHEREAS, In 2015, the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York has expanded its reach by providing representation to incarcerated individuals facing immigration issues, and the organization has recently created a Rapid Response Unit that provides immigration representation to individuals in 15 New York State counties; and

WHEREAS, The Prisoners' Legal Services of New York has and will always be an organization that is committed to ensuring access to courts and human rights for all incarcerated New Yorkers; and

WHEREAS, The importance of the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York was clear 50 years ago at its inception, and that importance remains constant today; then, as now, the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York remains a positive force determined to shape a more just society for many years to come; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the Prisoners' Legal Services of New York.