

BY: M. of A. Lavine

MEMORIALIZING Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim October 2026, as Pro Bono and Access to Justice Month in the State of New York and recognizing the State's pioneering role in expanding access to legal services

WHEREAS, Access to legal representation remains a fundamental component of a fair, equitable, and effective justice system, ensuring that all New Yorkers, regardless of income or background, can assert and defend their rights; and

WHEREAS, New York State has long been a national leader in promoting access to justice, establishing innovative programs and institutions that serve as models for states across the nation; and

WHEREAS, Pro bono legal services provided by members of the New York State Bar Association, local bar associations, legal services organizations, and law school clinics expand access to justice for low-income and vulnerable New Yorkers, helping to address civil legal needs in housing, family law, immigration, consumer protection, and public benefits; and

WHEREAS, New York courts have been among the first in the nation to partner with bar associations, law schools, and community organizations to establish court-connected pro bono programs, self-help centers, and virtual legal assistance initiatives, ensuring that all litigants can navigate the justice system effectively; and

WHEREAS, The Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, established in 2006 as a statewide policy and advocacy body, has been instrumental in coordinating pro bono initiatives, promoting public awareness, tracking unmet legal needs, and implementing strategic reforms to close the justice gap; and

WHEREAS, New York's pro bono and access to justice programs have achieved historic milestones, including the creation of LawHelpNY, a statewide online resource connecting New Yorkers to legal aid and self-help tools; the first statewide pro bono reporting and recognition program, promoting transparency and encouraging participation among attorneys; partnerships with law schools to provide clinical and student-run pro bono services, introducing future lawyers to the importance of public service; and court-connected initiatives targeting traditionally underserved communities, including immigrants, the elderly, and survivors of domestic violence; and

WHEREAS, These pioneering efforts have contributed to New York having one of the most robust and diverse pro bono infrastructures in the country, demonstrating a sustained commitment to ensuring that justice is not limited by financial means; and

WHEREAS, Recognizing Pro Bono and Access to Justice Month offers an opportunity to honor the attorneys, law students, judges, and community partners who dedicate their time, skills, and expertise to serve the public good, and to reaffirm the State's commitment to equity, fairness, and inclusion in the legal system; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to memorialize Governor Kathy Hochul to proclaim October 2026, as Pro Bono and Access to Justice Month in the State of New York, in recognition of the State's historic leadership in expanding access to justice, the contributions of the legal community in providing pro bono services, and the enduring efforts of the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to The Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor of the State of New York; the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, the New York State Bar Association; and local legal services and pro bono organizations, as a symbol of the respect, gratitude, and admiration of the State of New York.