



PRESS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge**

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Chief Judge DiFiore Joins Court and Local Officials to Open Walk-in “Legal Hand” Storefronts in the Bronx

BRONX, NEW YORK — Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks today joined State Assembly Member Latoya Joyner, Bronx Legal Services Project Director Jane Aoyama-Martin and community advocates to announce the launch of Legal Hand storefront centers in the Bronx neighborhoods of Highbridge and Tremont. The new Legal Hand sites will be the first to operate in Bronx County, expanding New York City’s network of Legal Hand storefront centers, which bring specially trained community volunteers directly into low-income neighborhoods to provide free legal information, assistance and referrals to help residents resolve issues in areas like housing, family, immigration, divorce, domestic violence, and benefits and try to prevent problems from turning into legal actions.

Legal Hand builds on the court system’s successful “Navigators” program, an initiative that utilizes trained non-lawyer volunteers to provide basic information and support to unrepresented litigants in housing and consumer credit cases in New York City. While the Navigator program operates in courtrooms and courthouses, Legal Hand makes such assistance readily available to people where they live, with the new Bronx centers located in easy-to-find storefronts, at 1759 Jerome Avenue in Highbridge and 713 E. Tremont Avenue in Tremont.

The Legal Hand program was developed by Helaine M. Barnett, chair of the New York Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, in collaboration with the Center for Court Innovation. The Center will run the Bronx sites. In addition to the new Bronx sites, Legal Hand storefront centers operate in Brooklyn's Brownsville and Crown Heights neighborhoods and in Jamaica, Queens.

Legal Hand volunteers, who are not attorneys, come from a range of backgrounds and reflect the diversity of the local community. They must undergo substantive training focusing on areas where emergencies commonly arise, such as housing, family, immigration, divorce, domestic violence, and benefits. Their training also covers cultural competency, interviewing skills, the limits on the advice non-lawyer volunteers are legally permitted to provide and the availability of referrals to legal services offices for full legal representation. An attorney from Bronx Legal Services will help train and supervise the volunteers at the new Bronx centers.

"I am so pleased to join our distinguished guests to celebrate Bronx County's launch of Legal Hand, a model that is helping break down barriers between the justice system and New York City's historically underserved communities. While attorney representation is always the ideal, the assistance of appropriately trained non-lawyers can make a meaningful difference to poor and moderate-income New Yorkers struggling with civil legal issues involving life's basic needs – leading to better outcomes and averting more serious legal problems," said Chief Judge DiFiore.

"The expansion of Legal Hand to Bronx County marks a milestone in our ongoing work to enhance access to justice for all New Yorkers. We owe a debt of gratitude to New York Permanent Commission on Access to Justice Chair Helaine Barnett, the Center for Court Innovation, Bronx Legal Services and our other legal services, community and government partners, including Assemblywoman Latoya Joyner, for their tremendous efforts in bringing these walk-in storefront Legal Hand centers to the Bronx," said Chief Administrative Judge Marks.

"We thank New York's Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, Center for Court Innovation and supporters for giving us this opportunity to participate in Legal Hand, an exciting new community-based program to make legal information more accessible. As the largest poverty civil legal services provider in the Bronx, Bronx Legal Services and Legal Services NYC are thrilled to partner with Legal Hand and to provide the full weight and resources of our

organization in ensuring its success. Legal Hand will make a meaningful impact by serving many more people in the Bronx communities,” said Jane Aoyama-Martin, project director of Bronx Legal Services.

The Bronx centers will be open weekdays, including some evening hours. Hours for the Highbridge center are Monday 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Tuesday and Wednesday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Thursday 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and Friday 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The Tremont center hours are Monday 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., Tuesday 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Wednesday 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Thursday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Friday 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

For more information about Legal Hand go to <http://www.legalhand.org/>.

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