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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Landmark Class Action Settlement Requires New York City and State Agencies to Provide Information About Food Stamps and Medicaid In Formats That Are Accessible to Persons Who Are Visually Impaired

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As a result of a landmark federal class action settlement secured by the National Center for Law and Economic Justice and Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP, New York City and State agencies will begin providing information about Food Stamps and Medicaid in a variety of alternate formats that are accessible to low-income persons who are blind or visually impaired. Prior to the settlement, the City and State agencies had provided information about these public benefits in standard written documents that those who are visually impaired could not read. This unfortunately imposed significant hardships upon some of New York City's most vulnerable citizens. The settlement will ensure that all low-income New York City residents who are blind or visually impaired will have independent and meaningful access to critically important information about these vital public benefits.

The class action, *Rafferty v. Doar*, No. 13-1410 (TPG), was filed in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. The case was brought under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act and related civil rights laws. The Parties have submitted the proposed settlement to the court and will seek its approval. Under the terms of the settlement, the City and State agencies have agreed to implement new procedures and systems, including:

- Conversion of applications, notices, forms, publications, and other documents into accessible alternate formats such as Braille, large print, audio recordings, CDs, and electronic formats that are compatible with assistive reading technology.
- Ensuring that qualified readers are available at City agency locations to provide assistance.
- Notice to applicants and recipients of the right to obtain information in alternative formats.
- Documentation of requests for alternative formats.
- Training of agency personnel regarding their duties and responsibilities to the visually impaired.
- Updating of City agency websites to comply with internationally accepted web content accessibility guidelines for persons who are visually impaired.

A copy of the full settlement agreement can be accessed by following the link posted at <http://nclej.org>. Support to NCLEJ for this class action was provided by the New York Community Trust.

According to Greg Bass of the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, “this groundbreaking settlement will provide meaningful access to these complex public benefits systems by obligating the State and City of New York to convert documents into alternate formats that those who are blind and visually impaired can effectively read.” He added, “through proper implementation, this new program should become a model for the State and for the Nation.”

Michael Daly and Joshua Link of Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP agreed. They stated that “government agencies should make reasonable accommodations so that citizens with visual impairments do not have to rely on others to do things that they otherwise could and would do by themselves.” They said that they are “gratified that these agencies are reforming their practices and are hopeful that other jurisdictions will follow their lead.”

About the National Center for Law & Economic Justice:

The National Center for Law and Economic Justice serves low-income families, individuals, and communities by advancing the cause of economic justice through ground-breaking, successful litigation and policy work around the country. It has provided legal representation, support, and advice to people living in poverty and their advocates since 1965.

www.nclej.org

About Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP:

Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP is a national law firm with 620 lawyers in 12 offices providing client service in areas such as intellectual property, commercial litigation, communications litigation, corporate and securities, corporate restructuring, employee benefits and executive compensation, environment and energy, government and regulatory affairs, health care, insurance coverage, investment management, labor and employment, life insurance and annuities, products liability and mass tort litigation, private client services, and real estate. The firm’s work on this matter is part of its Barbara McDowell High Impact Pro Bono Initiative, which honors the memory of the late Barbara McDowell. Ms. McDowell was a national leader in public interest advocacy, the founding director of the Appellate Advocacy Project of the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, and the wife of Drinker Biddle partner Jerry Hartman, one of the attorneys representing the plaintiffs in this case.

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