



# Association of Legal Aid Attorneys UAW 2325 (AFL-CIO)



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## **Statement by ALAA in Response to the Dissolution of the Temporary Restraining Order**

(New York, NY) - On Friday, December 15, a Federal Judge in the Eastern District of New York (EDNY) dissolved a temporary restraining order (TRO) which barred our union for almost a month from exercising the most basic right to our internal democratic processes—a membership vote.

On November 17, 2023, the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys - UAW Local 2325 (ALAA) began to conduct a membership vote on a resolution entitled “Resolution Calling for a Ceasefire in Gaza, and End to the Israeli Occupation of Palestine, and Support for Workers’ Political Speech.” However, after a lawsuit was filed by four members of our union, a Nassau County judge signed an Order to Show Cause granting a TRO less than an hour before the vote was scheduled to conclude. This lawsuit seeks to cast our union’s most democratic process and an essential facet of our organizational strength as discriminatory, arbitrary, and unlawful. This is simply not true. In the EDNY order issued from the bench, the Court found the plaintiffs failed to establish a record that any of the three prongs necessary to maintain the TRO were met. Among other things, the Court found plaintiffs did not show a likelihood of success on the merits of their claim that the Union breached its duty of fair representation or breached the ALAA’s By-Laws. Moreover, the Court found the TRO violated the Union’s free speech rights.

This lawsuit came on the heels of shameful and egregious conduct by numerous employers, including the [Legal Aid Society of New York City](#), the New York Legal Assistance Group, Nassau County Legal Aid Society, all unionized by ALAA, attempting to coerce an outcome by issuing their own statements about the underlying resolution they had no voice or vote in. One employer, the Legal Aid Society, even went so far as to hold a captive audience meeting denouncing the union’s proposed statement and urging members to vote no. In days prior, The Bronx Defenders and Neighborhood Defender Service sent cease and desist letters to ALAA,

threatening baseless actions when they were informed that local chapters planned to pass their own resolutions.

After our union was silenced by court order, members who voiced their opinions on the resolution were subjected to a vile campaign of doxxing by the *New York Post* and other external forces. Union emails and individual members' photos and names were published, leading to unsafe conditions for those members. Meanwhile, numerous articles were published about a similar union resolution passed overwhelmingly by our members at The Bronx Defenders Union, as they endured attacks from opposing counsel and a petition calling for the defunding of their organization. Nonetheless, our membership refused to be silenced. The rank-and-file organized around our right to speak, which could not be quietly brushed aside, while simultaneously pushing for the United Auto Workers to become the largest and most significant union to [call for a ceasefire](#).

Our union was founded on the principles of social activism and we have always engaged in advocacy beyond the narrow confines of collective bargaining. Our concern with the welfare, not just of our members, but of the clients and communities we serve, is a defining philosophy of our union that factors into every action and decision we take. ALAA stands apart because of our strong dedication to rank-and-file democracy, which has guided us for over fifty years. We opposed apartheid in South Africa, campaigned for Temporary Protected Status for Guatemalan unionists, marched against police violence in New York City and across the United States, and have demanded the end of US military aid to the Philippines. Just last year, our membership [overwhelmingly voted](#) in support of Palestinian liberation and called on the UAW International to divest itself from any and all Israel bonds. ALAA has not and will not shy away from taking a stance on issues of concern to our membership, and doing so in a manner which emphasizes maximum democratic participation. Democracy cannot exist when actions are restrained by court order.

“Neither courts nor employers should silence our union’s voice, which is heard most clearly through a membership vote,” said **Lisa Ohta, President of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys - UAW Local 2325**. “I have great faith and trust in our union’s democratic process and am excited to conclude our vote.”

“For the moment, justice has been served in the dissolution of this TRO,” said **Puja Paul, Trustee of ALAA - UAW Local 2325**, and a named defendant in the lawsuit. “The TRO not only stopped a vote, it limited our ability to *even discuss* the proposed resolution. As an officer of our local, I represent and report to the rank-and-file, and will defend the right of every member to be heard in a democratic vote.”

ALAA will now conclude voting on the resolution on Tuesday, December 19, 2023, from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

*ALAA - UAW Local 2325 is the nation’s oldest labor union of attorneys and legal services workers. Encompassing more than 2,700 members, ALAA represents the workers of the Legal Aid Society, Neighborhood Defender Service, The Bronx Defenders, Queens Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, New York Legal Assistance Group and dozens more organizations.*