



## *New York State Catholic Conference*

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RICHARD E. BARNES  
Executive Director

November 22, 2016

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor, State of New York  
Executive Chamber  
State Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224

**Re: S.8114 DeFrancisco / A.10706 Rules (Fahy)  
In relation to the Justice Equality Act**

Dear Governor Cuomo:

The above-referenced bill has unanimously passed both houses of the Legislature and has been sent to your office for Executive action. The New York State Catholic Conference respectfully urges your approval of this legislation.

This bill would require the State to reimburse all counties and cities for the expenditures of their indigent criminal legal service programs on an escalating scale until 2023, and thereafter, when the state shall provide full reimbursement. By federal mandate the burden for funding indigent legal services is currently the responsibility of each county of the state but adherence to this mandate is uneven and dependent on a particular county's ability or inability to properly fund the program. The gradual shift of funding responsibility over seven years to the State will ensure a constitutionally acceptable public defense standard and equal access to justice for all New Yorkers.

To the Church, the mandate to provide social justice for all, regardless of income, race, or any other difference, is based on God's call to us all to help the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, the hungry and the homeless. A fair and unbiased legal system is of extraordinary importance in fulfilling that call. The Catholic Conference believes a well-resourced indigent legal defense program is firmly in keeping with our long standing advocacy of criminal justice reform and must be supported.

We urge you to sign this legislation into law. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard E. Barnes