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Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Attorney General Merrick B. Garland Restores the Office for Access to Justice

U.S. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland today announced the restoration of a standalone Office for Access to Justice within the Justice Department dedicated to improving the federal government's understanding of and capacity to address the most urgent legal needs of communities across America.

"Making real the promise of equal justice under law was the founding principle of the Department of Justice and is the mission for which it must always stand," said Attorney General Garland. "There can be no equal justice without equal access to justice. And because we do not yet have equal access to justice in America, the task before us is urgent."

Today's announcement is the first step in the Attorney General's phased strategic plan to restore and expand the emphasis on access to justice within the department and throughout the federal government. The plan, which was submitted to the President last month, resulted from a strategic review process launched by the Attorney General in May, which engaged a wide range of stakeholders across all levels of government and beyond nationwide – including civil legal aid and public-defender organizations; pro bono practitioners; bar associations; data scientists; and leaders in environmental justice, economic justice and immigration reform. The review revealed that longstanding justice gaps in our country have been exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19. It identified a clear and immediate need for the restoration of a standalone office within the Justice Department dedicated to the mission of closing those gaps.

"As the only agency in our federal government that bears the name of a value, the Justice Department has a unique charge," said Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta. "Justice exists only if it is accessible to all. For this reason, the Attorney General's decision to rebuild the Office for Access to Justice and expand our efforts to remove the barriers to equal justice under law is a critical step."

In addition to restoring the Office for Access to Justice within the Justice Department, in his capacity as co-chair of the Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable (Roundtable), Attorney General Garland also released the Roundtable's 2021 report together with White House Counsel Dana Remus. The Roundtable, which the President reconvened earlier this year, brings together more than two dozen federal departments and agencies across the federal government to address the most pressing legal services challenges that low-income communities, communities of color, and many others across our country face today. The report released today details efforts across the federal government to drive innovation and expand access to justice during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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