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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ACCESS JUSTICE BROOKLYN ANNOUNCES PRESIDENT & CEO DEPARTURE, APPOINTS INTERIM REPLACEMENT

Brooklyn, New York — Access Justice Brooklyn announces the departure of President & CEO, Heidi Lee Henderson as she transitions into a new leadership position for a national organization in the nonprofit space; and appoints Senior Director of Development & Strategic Initiatives, Melissa Starr, as Interim President & CEO following the organization’s board meeting held on Wednesday, December 4, 2024. Heidi’s final day with the organization is Friday, December 6, 2024, after which Melissa will assume the Interim President & CEO role.

For the past decade, Heidi has led Access Justice Brooklyn (AJB) through a range of transformations, most notably strengthening the organizational infrastructure, more than doubling the staff size from six to fifteen; ensuring continued flexible positioning by growing the operational budget from just under \$700,000 to \$2.4 million; and guiding the organization through the myriad of unique challenges brought on by the Covid-19 global pandemic. She also advanced the organization’s rebrand from the Brooklyn Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project to Access Justice Brooklyn in June 2022, launching a new organizational identity and a renewed mission to providing high-quality, pro bono legal services and community education to Brooklyn neighbors in need.

“Heidi has been an extraordinary champion for people in the Brooklyn community. Her leadership over the last decade has been unparalleled, and she will be deeply missed. Thanks to Heidi’s vision, her tenacity, and the remarkable team she has built, Access Justice Brooklyn could not be better positioned to continue our mission to help ensure a more accessible legal system and equitable Brooklyn,” said Lynn Judell, AJB Board Chair.

“Thank you to Heidi for so many years of dedicated service, for presiding over such dynamic change and growth at Access Justice Brooklyn, and for her commitment to the values that are at the core of our organization. While we are mighty sad to see her go, we wish her the very best in all her new endeavors and are sure that her next chapters will be successful,” said Stephen Z. Williamson, AJB Board Vice Chair.

Heidi shared, *“It has been an honor to have led Access Justice Brooklyn for the past ten years. I am deeply proud of the organization’s accomplishments and growth. AJB is a force in our Brooklyn community—dismantling systemic barriers to justice by providing access and assistance to underserved Brooklynites as they navigate a complex legal system. I know that our talented and compassionate staff and volunteers, with the support of our dedicated board,*



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young professionals board, advisory board, and emeritus board, will continue to deliver critical legal services and impactful programming for years to come.”

Heidi continued saying the following, *“I am thrilled that Melissa Starr has been named AJB’s Interim President & CEO. I know that the organization will continue to flourish under her leadership, and I look forward to seeing AJB reach impressive, new achievements.”*

“Over the past seven years, I have had the privilege of working alongside Heidi, experiencing first-hand the impact of her leadership. She has guided, strengthened, and diversified AJB over her tenure with grace, flexibility, and the Brooklyn community in her mind and heart every step of the way. As we transition into this new chapter for AJB, I am honored to accept the role and responsibilities of Interim President & CEO. I look forward to furthering my collaboration with our extraordinary board and staff, building on well-established partnerships and shared values. Together, with our dedicated volunteers, generous supporters, and range of AJB stakeholders, we will continue to advance our critical mission and vision for an equitable Brooklyn, while ensuring programmatic accessibility and responsiveness to community needs,” said Melissa Starr, Senior Director of Development & Strategic Initiatives.

Melissa has been with the organization since 2017, working alongside Heidi and the AJB Board of Directors to plan, steer, and execute the organization’s fundraising and communications strategy as well as advance impactful and long standing philanthropic and programmatic partnerships. Melissa steps into the role of Interim President & CEO as the organization is in an exciting stage, relocating offices. AJB plans to welcome its staff, clients, volunteers, supporters, and extended community to 203 Jay Street in the upcoming new year.

Upon Melissa’s appointment, Co-Chairs of AJB’s Board Development Committee Caroline Conway and Adam Shepherd shared the following: *“Melissa has been a creative and driving force for growth and progress within AJB for the last seven years. Our organization is lucky to have such a talented and motivated team member within our existing ranks to step into the role of Interim President & CEO. Her experience, energy, and commitment will make for a smooth transition and a steady, positive path forward.”*

The AJB Board of Directors will conduct a comprehensive needs assessment and commence a search in the new year for a permanent President & CEO.

About Access Justice Brooklyn:

Access Justice Brooklyn partners with compassionate pro bono attorneys to provide high-quality, civil legal services that help ensure equal access to the legal system. The organization’s approach prioritizes the most basic, essential elements and experiences of human life, including housing, family stability, and subsistence income. Its proven pro bono



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model—recruit, train, supervise, and support—also provides flexibility to address new legal issues as they emerge. Everyone, whether an attorney or not, has a role to play in expanding access to justice.

Visit www.accessjusticebrooklyn.org or email info@accessjusticebk.org to volunteer, donate, or find other ways to get involved.

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