

The New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents

A special project of the Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations

STEERING COMMITTEE

Columbia County Reentry
Task Force

Hour Children

Hudson Children of
Incarcerated Parents
Partnership

Office of Children and
Family Services

NYC Mentoring Children
Collaboration

Permanent Judicial
Commission on Justice for
Children

Sills Family Foundation

The Correctional
Association of NY

The Osborne Association

NON-ENDORSING ADVISORS

ACS Children of
Incarcerated Parents
Program

Albany Police Department

NYS Office of Children and
Family Services

Department of Corrections
and Community Supervision

NYC Department for
the Aging- Grandparent
Resource Center

Office of Alcoholism &
Substance Abuse Services

*Membership includes more
than 50 representatives from
government agencies and
community and faith based
partners throughout
New York State.*

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF FUNDING FOR THE FAMILY VISITING BUS PROGRAM (A5942/S731A)

Representing diverse organizations, groups, and faith-based communities providing services and advocacy throughout New York State, we ask that funding for the Family Visiting Bus Program (“Visiting Bus”) be included in the FY 2021 State budget so that the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) can reinstate this critical service. Starting in 1973, DOCCS provided bus transportation to all New York State prisons at no cost to visitors; in 2011, they eliminated this service. As a result, visiting a loved one in prison became impossible or infrequent for many children and families throughout the state, leaving those incarcerated with significantly reduced contact with their support systems. Legislative bills A5942/S731A would reinstate this critical means of transportation by providing buses to all New York State prisons leaving from five major cities: Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, and New York City. Funding this invaluable program would be a smart investment that promotes successful reentry, lower recidivism rates, and children’s wellbeing, all positive outcomes that will result in long-term cost savings.

The elimination of the Visiting Bus Program has been devastating to families who relied on this means of transportation, and to incarcerated people who rely on visits to provide them with hope, healing, and the strong relationships that make a successful transition home more likely. New York State should be applauded for its foresight: we recognized the importance of family relationships long before research demonstrated that maintaining family ties is a key public safety, corrections, and reentry strategy; it improves the correctional environment during incarceration and reduces recidivism after release. Visiting also supports the positive outcomes of the more than 80,000 children with incarcerated parents in our state prisons who want and need to visit their parents.

Without the visiting buses, many families throughout the state are unable to get to prisons due to distance: 68% of incarcerated individuals from rural upstate areas are in prisons over 100 miles from their homes, and 58% of incarcerated individuals from the NYC metropolitan region are in prisons over 200 miles from their homes.¹ There were approximately **13,000 fewer visitors during the first year after the Visiting Bus program was eliminated.** The costs associated with travelling to a prison are prohibitive for many families, and most facilities cannot be accessed by public transportation. Many families simply do not have the means to visit regularly, if at all. As one mother who wanted to visit her incarcerated son stated, “Not providing buses is another way to punish poverty.”

¹ DiZerega, M., Asifuddin, F., & Tobias, L. (2012). New York State prison visiting bus: A public safety resource that benefits children and families. New York, New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

We applaud NY State for reducing both crime and incarceration over the past years. According to DOCCS, the closure of 17 prisons since 2011 has resulted in an overall annual savings of approximately \$193 million.² Families—particularly families of color and low income families—are deeply affected when a person goes to prison. Reinstating the bus program invests in families and restores our State’s commitment to children, families, and communities, a commitment New York demonstrated by offering this visiting program for 38 years. **We strongly urge you to include the allocation of \$3 million for the Family Visiting Bus Program in the FY 2021 NYS Budget.**

Thank you for your consideration,

1. Alliance of Families for Justice
2. Arthur Liman Center for Public Interest Law
3. Beacon Prison Rides/Beacon Prison Action
4. Bronx Defenders
5. Brooklyn Defender Services
6. Bronx Clergy Criminal Justice Roundtable
7. Bronx Christian Fellowship
8. CAIC (New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement)
9. Capital Area Against Mass Incarceration, Albany
10. Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services, CASES
11. Center for Community Alternatives, NYC, Rochester, and Syracuse
12. Center for Employment Opportunities
13. Center for Family Representation
14. Challenging Incarceration
15. Children of Promise
16. Children’s Defense Fund, New York
17. Children’s Haven, Bronx
18. Citizen Action of New York
19. Civil Rights Corps
20. Coalition for Women Prisoners
21. Concerned Clergy for Choice
22. Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies, NYS
23. College and Community Fellowship
24. Community Service Society
25. Correctional Association of New York
26. Echoes of Incarceration
27. Exalt Youth
28. Exodus Transitional Community, Inc.
29. Families, Fathers, and Children
30. Fortune Society
31. FPWA
32. Gods Battalion of Prayer, Brooklyn
33. Graham Windham
34. Greater Hudson Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents
35. Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood
36. Hindu Temple Society of North America
37. Hour Children
38. HousingPlus
39. JCCA
40. Just Leadership USA
41. Justice and Unity for the Southern Tier
42. Justice for Families
43. Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison
44. Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice
45. Legal Action Center
46. The Legal Aid Society
47. Mott Haven Children of Incarcerated Parents Initiative
48. Mental Health Association of NYS
49. Mt. Vernon Heights Congregational Church

² DOCCS Fact Sheet (January 2020). Available at :<http://www.doccs.ny.gov/FactSheets/PDF/currentfactsheet.pdf>

50. New Hope Christian Fellowship, Brooklyn
51. New Hour, Long Island
52. New York Board of Rabbis
53. New York City Jails Action Coalition
54. New York Civil Liberties Union, Capital Region Chapter
55. New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU)
56. New York County Defender Services
57. New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents
58. New York State Council of Churches
59. New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children
60. New York State Prisoner Justice Network, Albany
61. New York Zero to Three Network
62. The NYU Family Defense Clinic
63. Not On My Watch NYC
64. The Osborne Association
65. Partnership for the Public Good
66. Peaceprints of WNY
67. Planned Parenthood of New York City
68. Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay College
69. Project Attica
70. Repair the World
71. Sanctuary for Families
72. Sills Family Foundation
73. Speak Ya Truth
74. St. James' Church, NYC
75. STEPS to End Family Violence
76. Unchained, Syracuse
77. Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset
78. Urban Justice Center
79. Visionary V
80. VOCAL NY
81. Volunteers of Legal Services (VOLS)
82. We Got Us Now
83. Western New York Peace Center, Buffalo
84. Women's Community Justice Association
85. Women's Prison Association
86. Women and Justice Project
87. WORTH (Women on the Rise Telling HerStory)
88. Worth Rises
89. Youth Represent

cc: Governor Cuomo
Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins
Assembly Speaker Heastie
Members of the New York State Legislature