



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Gustavo Rivera

## Senator Rivera & Assembly Member Naomi Rivera Introduce Bill to Keep Families WITH Incarcerated Parents Together

GUSTAVO RIVERA April 11, 2012

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**Bronx, NY** – State Senator Gustavo Rivera (D,WF-Bronx) and Assembly Member Naomi Rivera (D-Bronx) introduced legislation in the State Senate and Assembly respectively that would establish a pilot program for the placement of incarcerated parents close to home and their children. Currently, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision does not take into account whether an incarcerated individual is a parent and where their children are located when determining where that individual should be housed. Transportation plays a major role in whether parents and children see each other on a regular basis.

“Families are stronger when they are kept together,” **said Senator Gustavo Rivera**, who serves as the ranking member on the Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections Committee. “Formerly incarcerated individuals are less likely to go back to prison if they have a close connection to friends and family while they are in prison and consequently, when they are released. Similarly, children are more likely to be successful and to have high self-esteem when they have a relationship with their parents. This pilot program is an important first step to

changing the way that our corrections system rehabilitates incarcerated individuals and the way in which we as a state approach issues that impact incarcerated families.”

According to **Assemblywoman Naomi Rivera**, Chair of the Assembly Subcommittee on Foster Care, "This is an enlightened approach to incarceration. It benefits not just the family of an inmate, but the entire community where they live. Ex-inmates who stay connected to their children during their incarceration are more likely to make a smooth transition back to society when they're released and to work harder to stay out of jail in the future." She added, "This is especially key when mothers are the ones who are jailed because over 80% of them are non-violent offenders who will return home. I'm looking forward to the results of this pilot program so that we can begin to apply its lessons and benefits to our entire penal system, the 100,000 children with a parent in prison or jail, and to the communities who receive returning inmates."

According to **Elizabeth Gaynes, executive director of the Osborne Association**, a Bronx-based criminal justice organization, "Children need their parents, even when those parents are in prison. Our country's incarceration policies have resulted in the greatest separation of children and parents since slavery. All efforts to increase and improve contact, and to support families as they struggle to sustain and strengthen family ties, will have near term benefits for children, and long term benefits for communities.

“The Pilot project for Placement of Inmates Close to Home” (S6855/A9475) was introduced as a way to gather data and feedback on how keeping families together can both prevent recidivism and also benefit the children of incarcerated individuals. Following the

implementation of this pilot program, this legislation calls for an independent, academic analysis of the effect of the pilot program. S6855 and A9475 have been referred to the State Senate and Assembly Committees on Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections.