



Testimony of Center for Court Innovation

Dipal Shah, Director of Strategic Partnerships

Public Protection Hearing

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Greetings esteemed Chairpersons and members of this committee. My name is Dipal Shah and I am Director of Strategic Partnerships at the Center for Court Innovation. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today at the joint hearing for the Public Protection Committee.

I am here today to urge the legislature to support a combined legislative appropriation of \$750,000 to support the Center for Court Innovation's most at-risk and under-resourced programs. In a time when reforming our justice system is more important than ever, and national headwinds threaten our progress, we urge this committee and the legislature to support this request. The time is now to ensure necessary programs and resources are available to our State's most under-resourced residents.

The Center for Court Innovation works to build safer and healthier communities and create a more effective and humane justice system throughout New York State. Independent evaluators have documented the success of our work in improving safety, aiding victims, and reducing incarceration. The Center serves more than 75,000 New Yorkers annually through more than two dozen operating projects. The requested appropriation of \$750,000 would be targeted directly towards enhancing operations for community crime prevention efforts at eight Center programs, including Neighbors in Action (formerly Crown Heights Community Mediation Center), Save Our Streets South Bronx, Bronx Community Solutions, Queens Youth Justice

Center, Harlem Community Justice Center, Red Hook Community Justice Center, Syracuse, and Legal Hand.

These programs provide a foundation for the changes sought by the State legislature. For example, the Center is working to reduce violence every day. The Center has more than 50 staff on the ground at Neighbors in Action, in Syracuse, and at Save Our Streets South Bronx, responding to community violence through proven restorative justice practices, youth-focused interventions, and credible messenger programs.

Through programs such as the Queens Youth Justice Center, Red Hook Community Justice Center, and Harlem Community Justice Center, the Center currently serves close to 7,000 at-risk youth each year, providing mental health interventions, academic support, workforce development, and more. This is a crucial piece of the Raise the Age puzzle. The impact of our work with youth can be seen in a teen that recently had been missing for a year in Queens. Queens Youth Justice Center staff located her and worked with her probation officer on resuming her engagement with Queens Youth Justice Center. Since her return, staff assessed her for trauma and other needs and she has returned to school. Queens Youth Justice Center staff have also ensured she has a safe space to live.

Similarly, the Center's supervised release programs, such as Bronx Community Solutions, are safely reducing – by the thousands – the number of New Yorkers behind bars because they cannot afford bail. Supervised release is an important part of the infrastructure required to end money bail.

Following on its role helping to create a Buffalo-based opioid response program, the Center is now coordinating opioid response programs in the Bronx, where in 2017 there were 342 unintentional opioid deaths. In the past year, 115 individuals have been engaged in the Bronx for opioid treatment services. Support from this body would enhance these efforts.

Through its Legal Hand program, the Center is also making a deep investment in improving access to justice for New Yorkers who may be reentering their community after system involvement or who may need assistance with acquiring needed services. Operating in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, Legal Hand trains local residents to empower their neighbors with legal information and access to services. Tens of thousands of individuals have benefited from Legal Hand's services. An example of the impact of Legal Hand was recently reflected in the engagement of a grandmother who came to Legal Hand for assistance in enrolling her granddaughter in her Medicare plan. Legal Hand volunteers, speaking in Spanish with the grandmother, worked with her and appropriate agencies to ensure all questions were answered and her granddaughter was covered. Stories like this animate the work of Legal Hand every day.

Last year, the Center received first-time funding through the fiscal year 2019 New York State budget negotiation process. This support was for one of the Center's operating programs, Neighbors in Action (formerly Crown Heights Community Mediation Center), with two separate awards to that program in the amount of \$100,000 and \$50,000. This year we urge this Committee and the legislature to support a general legislative appropriation of \$750,000 to the Center. In addition to the \$150,000 to Neighbors in Action, the remaining \$600,000 would be split evenly to enhance programming at seven of the Center's community crime prevention programs: Save our Streets South Bronx, Bronx Community Solutions, Queens Youth Justice

Center, Harlem Community Justice Center, Red Hook Community Justice Center, Syracuse programs, and Legal Hand. In so doing, the legislature will restore funding for Neighbors in Action, help to prevent crime in communities, and provide vital resources to under resourced communities and at-risk populations.

We urge all of you to support this request so that the Center can continue to serve New York State's most vulnerable residents – including women, young people, immigrants, communities of color, and the poor.

We look forward to forging a path forward towards a more just, safe, and fair New York with all of you. I am happy to take questions if you have any at this time and can also be reached at shahd@courtinnovation.org.