

February 12, 2020

2020 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection

Hearing Room B, Legislative Office Building, Albany

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Organization:

THE NEW YORK STATE DISPUTE RESOLUTION ASSOCIATION (NYS DRA)

Appearing on behalf of NYSDRA:

- Regina Ritcey, NYSDRA Executive Director
- Sarah Rudgers-Tysz, Mediation Matters Executive Director, NYSDRA Board-Immediate Past President

Good afternoon Honorable Committee Members. Thank you for this opportunity to speak at today's hearing. We are here on behalf of the statewide network of Community Dispute Resolution Centers, or CDRCs. My name is Regina Ritcey, the Executive Director of the New York State Dispute Resolution Association.

Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Rudgers-Tysz, Executive Director of Mediation Matters, the Community Dispute Resolution Center serving Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Warren, and Washington counties, and I also serve on the Board of Directors of NYSDRA.

NYSDRA is a nonprofit organization, and the association of the network of Community Dispute Resolution Centers, or CDRCs and their mediators, as well as private dispute resolution practitioners. NYSDRA manages several statewide mediation and arbitration programs under contract with various state agencies, providing administration, advocacy, training, and technical support to the CDRCs. Since 1981 the CDRCs, in partnership with OCA and NYSDRA, have provided dispute resolution services at no or low cost to participants. The CDRCs are a community resource available to everyone in the state.

Currently there are 20 CDRCs providing services to all 62 New York counties. CDRCs match OCA funding nearly dollar for dollar through contracts, grants, and fees. Their work helps people address conflict through mediation, conciliation, arbitration, restorative justice, and related. The vast majority of the work is done pro bono—by professionally trained community members—volunteers whose donated time and skills are valued at \$2.3 million annually, making the CDRCs an excellent return on investment.

NYSDRA and the CDRCs align directly with Chief Judge DiFiore's Excellence Initiative which has brought Presumptive Dispute Resolution to the courts. The goals of the initiative: To improve court efficiencies and user experience, and

improve access to justice for all New Yorkers. New York Courts are now required to add Presumptive Dispute Resolution to standard court practice. It is an innovation that does not mandate but rather makes available options, such as mediation, that have proven to be highly satisfactory to users and cost-effective for all.

We are here to ask the Legislature to help meet the increasing demand for quality dispute resolution services by preserving the \$1.2 million appropriation for contract funding in the Judiciary Budget and directing the majority of that funding to the CDRCs to help them sustain their work for this initiative. We also seek to preserve the appropriation in the Executive Budget of \$10 million in the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Aid to Localities budget for state and local crime reduction, youth justice, and gang prevention.

As demand for this work and recognition of the efficiencies and efficacy of mediation and related processes expands, the costs of providing services also increases. The CDRCs need support to meet the demands of Presumptive Dispute Resolution and continue to provide services – both for court referred and community and consumer matters.

The CDRCs are key to school violence prevention and the \$10 million in the DCJS Aid to Localities budget will enable CDRCs to respond to and expand school and community violence prevention programs. By deescalating conflict before a crisis occurs, more youth will be kept out of the juvenile justice system and communities will have increased supports and resources for crime prevention.

We have been meeting with legislators in district and here in Albany, and have had great response to our work and these budget requests. By funding skilled, responsive, proven, cost-effective Community Dispute Resolution Programs the Legislature will make an immediate and positive difference for individuals and communities throughout New York State. Thank you.