



## **Testimony in Support of Community-Based Conflict Resolution**

### **Request for \$3 million funding of the NYS Community Dispute Resolution Center Program**

Theresa Hobbs, Executive Director of the New York State Dispute Resolution Association (NYSDRA), on behalf of the statewide network of Community Dispute Resolution Centers, requests support for the New York State Community Dispute Resolution Center Program (CDRCP). NYSDRA is both a contract program administrator and a professional association - the CDRCs have been our members since 1985.

In 1981, the New York legislature was the first in the country to pass legislation that created a network of centers to provide dispute resolution services in all 62 of its counties. For over forty years, New York's Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs) have provided low-to-no cost mediation and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) services to New Yorkers, ensuring access to justice for thousands each year, and providing tools and practical means for people across the State to address conflict peacefully and productively - conflicts which could otherwise escalate to violence, court cases, or civic unrest in the absence of these proactive practices and critical interventions.

CDRCs and their professionally trained ADR practitioners work with community members, local businesses, families, schools, courts, and law enforcement to constructively work through conflicts and find peaceable solutions. Their efforts prevent violence and costly legal battles and restore essential community relationships. Last year the network served over 50,000 individuals and resolved over 20,000 cases.

Mediation also saves the State and court system money and resources. From start to finish, the average mediation costs just \$336, which is far less than court costs for even minor criminal or civil matters.



Nearly 80% of mediations conclude with a written agreement, usually within just a few weeks of the initial contact with individuals through an intake process. The CDRC network offers access to efficient and effective justice for all New Yorkers, especially for our most vulnerable populations.

To do this work, CDRCs depend on a grant from the New York State Office of Court Administration (OCA), which partially funds their programs and services. This partial funding is a fundamental design of the program - as the CDRC program was never intended to be solely funded by the judiciary. The work and services provided by the CDRCs touch all aspects of our communities and lives, helping to ensure public safety and so much more.

Demand for this work continues to grow, as do the costs of providing services. When funding is inadequate, needs go unmet, and programs cannot grow and evolve in an organic and responsive manner. These shortfalls translate into unsafe homes, unsafe communities, and unsafe cities.

While OCA funding for the CDRC program has grown over the years (\$8.4 million in FY 2023-24), so has its required match. Centers must secure a dollar-for-dollar funding match on 60% of its allocation in order to access this funding. The match requirement that is baked into this program is, and has always been, intended to be an invitation for partnerships within government to solve public safety problems together.

NYSDRA is seeking the legislature's partnership to diversify support and sustain funding. We ask for \$3 million in the upcoming budget - covering approximately 50% of the centers' required match, which would allow the CDRCs to retain skilled staff, serve rising demand, and remain accessible to all constituents in need of services from Buffalo to Montauk.



This vital program was the first of its kind in 1981. We urge you to ensure that it continues thriving for the next forty years and beyond. Show New Yorkers that you support community solutions and funding what actually works for safer, more just communities. The CDRCs' positive impact is only limited by the funding available.

A \$3M legislative add to the State Budget would make it possible for the CDRC network to continue to provide responsive, effective, and accessible dispute resolution services to constituents in all 62 counties, and fully realize the program's intent.

On behalf of all New Yorkers served, I sincerely thank you for your consideration and proposed investment in this transformative program.

Submitted by: Theresa Hobbs, Executive Director

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**New York State Dispute Resolution Association, Inc.**

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