

Testimony of Theresa Hobbs, Executive Director

New York State Dispute Resolution Association (NYS DRA) Before the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection – FY 2026

Good morning Chairs and esteemed committee members.

My name is Theresa Hobbs, and I am the Executive Director of the New York State Dispute Resolution Association (NYS DRA). I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of critical funding for the Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs), as well as funding for NYSDRA to administer the Community Justice and Resolution Initiative (CJRI).

Supporting the Judiciary Budget & CDRC Funding

We strongly urge the legislature to support the judiciary's budget as submitted, which includes critical funding for the statewide Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs). The court is requesting a 10% increase in its budget, as well as an additional \$3 million specifically for the CDRCs, which includes a 3% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to help centers retain skilled staff and sustain essential services.

For over 40 years, the CDRCs have provided accessible mediation and conflict resolution services in all 62 counties, helping tens of thousands of New Yorkers each year resolve disputes outside of the courtroom, reducing the burden on the judicial system and providing fair, cost-effective justice.

Supporting the judiciary's budget ensures that CDRCs can:

- **Retain trained staff who provide critical mediation services statewide.**
- **Continue offering low- or no-cost mediation for families, small businesses, landlords and tenants, and neighbors.**
- **Keep pace with increased demand for alternative dispute resolution.**

Funding for the CDRCs is a **proven investment in public safety and community well-being**—one that **saves taxpayer dollars** by reducing reliance on courts and law enforcement to resolve disputes.

While the judiciary's proposed budget sustains the core operations of the CDRCs, it does not cover many of the unfunded programs and emerging needs that CDRCs are uniquely positioned to address. That is why NYSDRA is separately requesting \$3 million from the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) to support the Community Justice and Resolution Initiative (CJRI).

Funding Request: The Community Justice and Resolution Initiative (CJRI) – \$3M

In addition to supporting the CDRCs, **NYSDRA seeks \$3 million in funding from the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) for the Community Justice and Resolution Initiative (CJRI)**. This initiative will **expand access to conflict resolution programs**, helping to address **unmet needs and emerging justice issues**.

Proposed CJRI Program Areas & Allocations:

✓ **Community Mediation – \$750,000**

Supports **2,000–2,500 cases annually**, de-escalating community disputes before they turn into legal conflicts.

✓ **Youth Empowerment Through Peer Mediation – \$400,000**

Implements peer mediation in schools and youth programs, benefiting **1,500+ students annually**.

✓ **Restorative Practices in Education – \$350,000**

Expands restorative justice in **K-12 and higher education**, reducing suspensions and improving school climates.

✓ **Restorative Justice Diversion Programs – \$500,000**

Diverts **750–1,000 cases** annually from the criminal justice system, reducing recidivism rates.

✓ **Training for Nonprofits, Government & Businesses – \$300,000**

Provides **conflict resolution training for 300+ professionals** across **50+ organizations** statewide.

✓ **Hate & Bias Prevention and Response – \$250,000**

Supports **100+ hate/bias incident interventions** annually, strengthening community cohesion.

✓ **Violence Prevention & Intervention – \$250,000**

Addresses **high-stakes disputes**, mediating **150+ cases annually** in vulnerable communities.

✓ **Mediation Training for Community Members – \$200,000**





Empowers **200 individuals annually** to become trained mediators, building **local conflict resolution capacity**.

Why CJRI Matters:

- ✦ **Enhances Public Safety** – Expands conflict resolution programs aligned with **DCJS’s mission** to prevent crime and promote community safety.
- ✦ **Reduces Court Caseloads** – Diverts cases from the **criminal justice system** to **restorative justice programs**.
- ✦ **Improves Outcomes for Youth & Families** – Strengthens **educational environments and family stability**.

NYSDRA’s Role as Program Administrator:

To ensure the successful implementation of **CJRI**, NYSDRA will oversee:

-  **Data Collection & Reporting** – Ensuring transparency and accountability.
-  **Quality Assurance & Best Practices** – Establishing consistent program standards.
-  **Funding Administration** – Equitably distributing funds across the **CDRC network**.
-  **Technical Assistance & Training** – Providing support to maximize program impact.

Projected Impact of CJRI:

- ✓ **4,000–6,000 disputes resolved annually**
- ✓ **10,000–12,000 New Yorkers served directly each year**
- ✓ **Thousands more benefit through safer schools, workplaces, and communities**

Conclusion: Investing in Proven Solutions

The CDRCs and the **Community Justice and Resolution Initiative (CJRI)** offer **cost-effective, community-based alternatives** that strengthen public safety, reduce reliance on the courts, and ensure justice for all New Yorkers.

We urge the **legislature’s partnership** in securing **\$3 million for CDRC funding in the Judiciary Budget** and **\$3 million for CJRI through DCJS**. These investments will **expand mediation services, prevent crime, and ensure equitable access to justice** across New York.

On behalf of **NYSDRA, the CDRC network, and the thousands of New Yorkers who rely on these programs**, I sincerely thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.

Theresa Hobbs

Executive Director

New York State Dispute Resolution Association (NYSDRA)