

Center for Justice Innovation

2026 Joint Legislative Hearings: Human Services

Create a Statewide Supervised Visitation Program for Custody/Visitation Cases

Dear Senate Finance Committee Chair Liz Krueger and Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair J. Gary Pretlow, the State Coalition for Supervised Visitation (Coalition) writes to submit testimony about the critical need for New York to establish a high-quality, free statewide supervised visitation program.

In May 2024, the New York State Unified Court System (UCS), and the Center for Justice Innovation (the Center), in partnership with the Governor's Office, launched the Family Justice Initiative: Court and Community Collaboration (Initiative). The Hon. Rowan D. Wilson, Chief Judge of the State of New York appointed Hon. Richard Rivera as the new Statewide Coordinating Judge for Family Court Matters to lead this Initiative and asked the Center to facilitate a strategic planning process to develop a broad vision for what makes an effective family-serving system as well as a comprehensive plan to support that vision.

It has long been established there is a need for safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable supervised visitation programs on custody and visitation cases in every county.<sup>1</sup> Increasing the availability of these services was consistently raised in Initiative partner meetings, from a diverse array of Initiative participants. Similarly, the Office of Court Administration's newly launched Permanent Commission on Justice for Families (Commission) heard from many of its members that they believed there was a substantial need for a statewide supervised visitation program to serve families engaged in custody/visitation cases. Based on these conversations, as well as the work done by Office for Justice Initiatives' Working Group on Supervised Visitation, the New York State Coalition for Supervised Visitation (Coalition) was created, to highlight and educate about the importance of the establishment of a statewide supervised visitation program, and to unify and amplify the many voices around the state already calling for this program. The Coalition includes members from the Initiative, the Commission, the Office for Justice Initiatives, the Hon. Betty Weinberg Ellerin Commission on Women in the Courts, and an impressive roster of jurists, court actors, legal services, advocacy agencies, and other system- and community-based players across the state.

The Coalition recommends the creation of a free, high quality statewide supervised visitation program to support safe contact between children and parents involved in family court custody and visitation cases. Such matters may involve intimate partner violence,

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<sup>1</sup> [Report from NYS Working Group on Future of SV in NY July 2025; Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Blueprint; Family Justice Initiative: Preliminary Report and Recommendations - Center for Justice Innovation](#)

substance use and mental health issues that create a risk of harm to both children and survivors of violence. However, because there is no attendant child protective proceeding filed in these custody/visitation matters, local child welfare agencies cannot provide supervision of visits.

Currently, there are 32 counties that do not have a supervised visitation program for custody/visitation matters, up from 20 counties as of the writing of the 2023 Preliminary Report of the OCA Working Group. Those programs that do exist continue to be limited and have long waitlists – some stretching as long as six months or more. Additionally, existing programs are often cost-prohibitive for litigants and limited in terms of the number of visits that they can provide. Access to these services may be further impacted by limited hours of operation, available languages, and transportation challenges.

While a select few service providers have received funding to provide limited supervised visitation through state agencies, such as the Office of Children and Family Services, the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, the Office of Violence Against Women, or through private sources, the fact is that these funding sources are not consistent, stable, or sufficient. More consistent funding is needed to stabilize and expand what is now at best critical programming provided through a patchwork of temporary grants and local appropriations.

A bill to establish state-funded supervised visitation was reintroduced in the 2025-2026 Legislative Session.<sup>2</sup> The Bill passed the Assembly, but a version of the Bill needs to be incorporated into the budget with a state appropriation. The Coalition was disappointed that Supervised Visitation was again not included in the Governor's budget. We strongly urge both Houses to include this appropriation in their one house bill as the previously introduced bills are unfunded directives.

This legislation would amend the Social Services Law to establish a supervised visitation program statewide administered by the Office of Victim Services, in consultation with the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence. However, the components of the bill can be adapted to whichever executive agency is tasked with implementing the program. While the Initiative does not take a position on which agency should be selected, it does note that it should be an agency willing to champion the bill and negotiate with the Executive for inclusion in its budget. The identified agency would be required to distribute state funds appropriated for this purpose from the Executive Budget, as well as any available federal funds, to county Departments of Social Services and to the Administration for Children's Services in New York City. Localities would contract with nonprofit agencies to provide

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<sup>2</sup> [NY State Senate Bill 2025-S3938A](#); [NY State Assembly Bill 2025-A65](#)

services. The bill also requires programs to provide affordable, culturally sensitive services with language access for non-English speakers.

Thank you, Senator Krueger and Assembly Member Pretlow, for reading the Coalition's testimony and we hope you support this important legislation and advocate for funding from the state budget for implementation.