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Center for Justice Innovation
New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Public Protection
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Thank you Senate Finance Committee Chair Krueger and Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair Pretlow for holding today’s joint legislative hearing on Public Protection. My name is Hailey Nolasco, Senior Director of Government Relations at the Center for Justice Innovation (the Center). Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony.

The Center works to reduce the harms of both community violence and overreliance on traditional responses like incarceration through a community justice lens. By bridging courts, government, and communities, we aim to increase communication, understanding, and trust while creating more effective and equitable public safety systems.

We advance this work through our Community Justice Center model, a strategic and evidence-informed approach to addressing complex public safety challenges. A Community Justice Center is a place-based partnership that brings courts and community safety strategies closer to the neighborhoods they serve, integrating accountability with services and prevention. These centers address the underlying drivers of justice system involvement, such as substance use, poverty, housing instability, and mental health challenges. This is done while fostering collaboration among residents, service providers, and justice system stakeholders to strengthen communities and expand opportunity.

Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson has called on New York to “invest in institutions and spaces that reanimate community life.”¹ He has written that expanding Community Justice Centers statewide is a top priority for his administration because they reduce incarceration, improve public safety, enhance public trust, save taxpayers money, and foster community.”²

Across New York City, this approach has demonstrated that when people can access accountability and opportunity in one place—closer to home—courts become more effective, communities become safer, and public systems become more efficient. **Over the years, robust, independent evaluations** of our Justice Centers have shown measurable public safety impacts and cost savings:

¹ Wilson, Rowan D. “Reanimating Community Life Through Community Justice Centers,” *New York Law Journal* (Jan. 13, 2025)

² *Ibid.*

- **Red Hook Community Justice Center:** Recidivism reduced by 10 percent and juvenile rearrests reduced by 20 percent. \$2 were estimated to have been saved for every \$1 spent. Additional analyses have estimated \$4,756 were saved per defendant and nearly \$15 million over the year were saved in avoided victimization costs (study cohort).³
- **Harlem Community Justice Center:** The Harlem Parole Reentry Court, which ran from 2001 to 2019, reduced reconviction at 18 months post release (29 percent versus 37 percent), reduced revocation (12 percent versus 22 percent), and reduced felony reconviction (4 percent versus 10 percent).⁴
- **Midtown Community Justice Center:** During the study period, participants sustained 84 percent compliance with community service mandates. Before decriminalization, prostitution-related arrests were down 56 percent in 18 months and unlicensed vending arrests down 24 percent.⁵

The Center has over 30 years of operational experience advancing New York’s community justice model and supporting more than two dozen jurisdictions nationally in adapting proven strategies. New York now has the opportunity to build on this success, establishing a statewide framework that is consistent, measurable, and locally co-designed, where readiness is strongest.

The Center is proposing a three-pronged approach to advance community safety statewide. We are requesting support from the state to do the following:

- Invest in scaling three anchor Community Justice Center sites located in the Bronx, New Rochelle, and Syracuse.
- Provide support for the Center to offer planning grants and technical assistance to four additional jurisdictions to support ongoing public safety needs: Yonkers, Albany, Buffalo, and Rochester.
- Stand up statewide training, coordination, and evaluation capacity to ensure quality, consistency, and continuous improvement across sites.

Proposed Expansion Sites:

We are requesting \$6 million in funding to bring the following Community Justice Centers to scale in their respective locales, at a cost of approximately \$2 million per site.

- **Bronx Community Justice Center:** Fully establish a boroughwide Justice Center strategy integrating problem-solving pathways with youth opportunity, workforce

³ Lee, C.G., et al. A Community Court Grows in Brooklyn: A Comprehensive Evaluation of the Red Hook Community Justice Center (NCSC/NIJ, Nov. 2013)

⁴ Ayoub, L.H. & Pooler, T. Coming Home to Harlem: A Randomized Controlled Trial of the Harlem Parole Reentry Court (OJP, Oct. 2015)

⁵ Center for Court Innovation. Community Courts: The Research Literature (Apr. 2011)

development and economic mobility, and community-led crime prevention, grounded in piloted initiatives and established partnerships.

- **New Rochelle Community Justice Center:** Advance the City’s Justice Center Innovation Hub within its planned community space and build a replicable model for suburban/medium-city implementation.
- **Syracuse Community Justice Center:** Strengthen a regional Justice Center model aligned with courts, local government, and community organizations around diversion, housing justice, and upstream safety.

Technical Assistance and Planning Support for Additional Jurisdictions:

The Center has initiated readiness and design discussions with judiciary leadership, district attorneys’ offices, mayoral/city leadership, and local community-based organizations in the locales below. We are requesting \$2 million in funding for the following services, at the cost of approximately \$500,000 per site:

- **Yonkers:** Service mapping, governance model, and pilot operations blueprint
- **Albany:** Stakeholder alignment, site selection, and an implementation plan
- **Buffalo:** Court/community pathway design, training plan, and roadmap to launch
- **Rochester:** Upstream safety integration plan linked to existing community infrastructure

Governance and Accountability

Each site will operate with a local steering committee and formal operating agreements among core partners. The Center will support a shared performance dashboard and quarterly reporting to state partners covering utilization, service linkage, outcomes, and implementation milestones—paired with learning supports to ensure model quality and continuous improvement.

Conclusion

This practical, scalable strategy will strengthen an approach to safety and justice that already works, expand to additional regions that are ready, and provide a statewide “playbook” that protects fidelity to the model while allowing for local design. With support from the state, the Center can build a consistent statewide framework with training, evaluation, and continuous improvement built in. We look forward to working in partnership to advance community justice throughout New York State.