



## **Memo of Support of S724A (Montgomery) / A6710A (Rozić)**

### **NYC DOCCS Proximity Bill**

At least 80,000 children have parents in New York state prisons. Most of these children need contact with their parents during the period of their incarceration. Distance is the most frequently stated barrier to visiting among children, caregivers, and child welfare staff. A majority of New York's prisons are in remote areas and inaccessible by public transportation. Current placement policy includes bringing an incarcerated person closer to home *only* as he or she nears his or her release date—a practice that runs counter to research demonstrating that maintaining or strengthening ties between incarcerated parents and their children is critical in preventing recidivism, promoting a lasting successful return to the community, and improving parent-child relationships post-release. We support the proximity bill because it will diminish these barriers, and center children and families in the state's decision-making about incarceration for parents. Visiting is a lifeline for children and families and we call on the Governor to sign bill S724A/A6710A immediately.

The Children's Defense Fund-New York (CDF) has a unique approach to improving conditions for children, combining research, public education, policy development, community organizing, and advocacy. A recognized authority in the endeavor to protect children and strengthen families, CDF serves as a resource and partner for children, families, and organizations throughout New York State. We leverage our national influence to eliminate the harmful and disproportionate impact that poverty has on children in New York and to eliminate race and gender inequities in the areas of early childhood, education, health, housing, child welfare and youth justice.

Research in child development demonstrates the importance of physical contact between young children and their parents. Children who are unable to visit their parents are at an increased risk for insecure attachment, potentially hindering healthy development and their ability to form positive social relationships. A child's distress during a period of separation is experienced as anxiety and may lead to depression, delinquency, and academic problems. Yet parents are often placed in prisons far from their children, creating a barrier for visiting, and maintaining or building relationships. This legislation would permit incarcerated parents to be placed in the closest facility to their children as long as the facility provides the same security level, medical needs, and necessary programming.

The legislation is also especially timely now, as we confront the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on Black and Latinx communities who are also overrepresented in the prison system. This bill would help alleviate some of the financial strain on families with children who have diminished resources for visiting.

For more information concerning the bill, please contact: Julia L. Davis, Esq. Director of Youth Justice & Child Welfare, Children's Defense Fund-NY, [jdavis@childrensdefense.org](mailto:jdavis@childrensdefense.org).