



## TESTIMONY

### Public Hearings on the Executive Budget Before the Joint Fiscal Committees of the Senate and Assembly Public Protection

Respectfully submitted by:

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Joint Fiscal Committees of the Senate and Assembly Public Protection

My name is Susan Jacobs and I am the Executive Director and President of the Center for Family Representation (CFR). CFR provides free legal representation and social work services to enable children from vulnerable families to live with their parents safely. We work to prevent children from entering the foster care system or to keep their time in care to a minimum.

We serve 2,000 parents annually with 5,000 children: all of our clients live in poverty, 92% are people of color, 76% are women, 23% are survivors of domestic violence, and 20% are immigrants. Our representation has generated millions in savings to the State in reduced foster care costs: In 2007 before our model was implemented, the city-wide average length of stay in foster care in NYC was 11.5 months.

In 2013, 57% of our families' children never entered foster care. Of those that did, their average length of stay was just over two months. By shortening children's lengths of stay since 2007, we calculate that we reduced the cost of foster care by \$203 million (a third of which is direct savings to the State).

The Family Courts in New York are both incredibly important to the well being of vulnerable children and families and incredibly short of resources: The Courts in which I have practiced for over 30 years, hear the most important cases in the lives of children: where children will live, who will take care of them, when and who will visit them, who will support them. Importantly, in the cases my office handles, the questions in front of the court are whether and to what extent children may be in imminent or actual danger of harm and whether they need to be removed from their homes.

The Center for Family Representation (CFR) supports the Judiciary budget addition of 20 Family Court Judges statewide: The number of judges in NYS Family Court has not increased since 1962, yet the number of cases filed has soared. In 2012, almost 700,000 Family Court cases were filed statewide. There are simply not enough judges to give these cases fair hearings or decisions. The



result of the untenable caseload are delays in critical life decisions for children, inadequate or no access to hearings and placement of children in out of home care (especially foster care) for lengths of time that are almost the longest and most expensive in the country.

CFR also strongly supports the restoration of budget cuts which necessitated the elimination of overtime in the New York City Family courts. As a result, the courtrooms are required to stop hearing cases at 4:30pm and new petitions must be filed by 3:00 PM in order to be heard that day. This has seriously impacted our practice and clients. The budget cuts have created long delays between hearing dates.

In one case, these delays prevented our client from being able to move back into his home and reunite with his children for a year and a half. The case against him was filed in December 2011 and he was excluded from the home. The hearing started in May of 2012. The next court date was April 2013. When the hearing was finally finished, the court lifted the exclusion and his children returned home. He was excluded from home for close to a year and a half. The needless placement of his children in foster care cost the taxpayers approximately \$36,000 per child per year.