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## Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs)

### FY 2016-17 Budget Request

#### The Request

New York's Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs) have provided free or low-cost mediation, facilitation, conciliation, and arbitration services to New Yorkers since 1981, providing access to justice and tools for people across the State to address conflict peacefully and productively. Slightly over one half of their funding is through the New York State Office of Court Administration (OCA), which funded the CDRCs at \$5.3 million in FY 2015-16, with a similar amount expected in FY 2016-17. The CDRCs are requesting a \$3 million legislative add in FY 2016-17. That increase would bring the total CDRC funding in FY 2016-17 to \$8.3 million.

#### Background

State funding for the CDRC network was cut by 44% in FY 2011-12. The funding reduction was due to the State's poor economic condition and was one result of the \$170 million cut to New York's Judiciary. In the past five years, none of those lost funds have been restored, while the need for CDRC services has only increased. The network continues to work with OCA to address the CDRC funding crisis, but given the many ways in which CDRC services benefit communities beyond the courts, CDRCs need to diversify their base of support.

After the cuts, the CDRCs streamlined their staff and programs, and continued to provide responsive and accessible services to New Yorkers in all 62 counties. CDRC services are used to address a variety of matters, including inter-personal (neighbors, custody, visitation, and family), workplace, public welfare, housing, youth, civil, and criminal. The programs are now at a crisis point and need additional funding.

Access to justice is the right of all New Yorkers. Demand for the work of the CDRCs continues to grow, while the cost of providing services continues to rise. Without an additional investment, the CDRCs will soon be forced to further reduce services, eliminate key staff and programs, and decline new opportunities. The end result will be a weakened CDRC network and fewer opportunities for New Yorkers seeking help with the difficult conflicts in their lives.

The CDRC network has a broad, longstanding statutory mandate to meet communities' conflict resolution needs, thus establishing its role outside the court system. In the past, CDRCs successfully leveraged OCA-funded programs and fostered local partnerships to provide additional services needed in their communities. These included innovative services for veterans, aging adults and their caregivers, young people, schools, families, and people leaving the corrections system. Since the funding cuts, many of these programs have been eliminated or restricted, resulting in a loss of important community resources for vulnerable populations.

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**Conflict resolution is cost effective, yet provides high-quality service.** Conflict resolution is not a short cut – it is a professional service that provides individuals, families, and groups with an effective alternative to public intervention.

**Mediation saves the State money and resources.** In a time of lean budgets and increased need for government efficiency, the State's investment in the CDRCs is a smart choice. Early use of mediation prevents conflicts from escalating. From start to finish, the average mediation costs just \$336, which is far less than the cost borne by the courts for even the most minor criminal or civil matter. Just as important, participants' high compliance rate with their mediated settlements keeps them from returning to court.

**Sixty-seven percent of CDRC cases are mediated by volunteers.** CDRCs employ dedicated professional staff members who work with hundreds of professionally-trained community volunteers. These volunteers receive their training from OCA-certified mediation trainers and complete mandatory apprenticeships and continuing education. This use of volunteers represents another significant savings of limited public dollars. In FY 2014-15, volunteers donated 38,725 hours of time with a value of approximately \$2.3 million.

**Mediation produces high-quality results.** In FY 2014-15, the CDRCs served a total of 70,275 individuals and screened 28,262 cases. CDRCs design their services to respond to individual needs and facilitate people's ability to craft their own solutions and resolve their conflicts constructively. Ninety-two percent of the people who mediated through the CDRCs were satisfied with their mediation in FY 2014-15.

**The CDRC network plays a vital support role beyond the court system.** Although 52% of CDRCs' cases in FY 2014-15 were referred by the courts, 48% came from community referrals, such as public agencies, schools, and individuals. CDRCs enable people to seek and obtain help on their own, before their conflicts rise to the level of public intervention. In addition to mediation, CDRCs provide training and other services to organizations throughout their communities.

**A legislative add will supplement the foundation built by the CDRCs and OCA, allowing a return to the diverse array of services once offered. The add will directly benefit communities by empowering more constituents to seek creative, workable solutions to their conflicts.**

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