

**Testimony to the New York State
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Public Protection**

Public Hearing

February 13, 2025

Tanya Krupat
Vice President, Policy & Advocacy
Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations



Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. My name is Tanya Krupat and I am the Vice President for Policy and Advocacy at Osborne Association. As you may know, Osborne is one of the largest and oldest criminal justice service organizations in the state. Our services reach over 14,000 individuals each year, assisting them and their families in navigating arrest, courts, incarceration on Rikers and in state prisons, and reentry. We have offices in Harlem, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Newburgh, White Plains, and Troy, with our headquarters in the South Bronx. We also have programming in 39 state prisons and on Rikers Island. This programming includes an array of services – video visiting at 11 prisons and Rikers, discharge planning, parenting and relationship programs, and health and wellness programs. Osborne also now provides a variety of reentry housing, including the Fulton Community Reentry Center, which we opened last April. Fulton, a former prison, now provides transitional supportive housing for 140 men returning from DOCCS.

My testimony highlights the diverse work Osborne does across the continuum of criminal legal system involvement, from arrest to reentry, and our recommendations for policy and practice changes. All of our work at Osborne is grounded in our core values, which include recognizing our shared humanity, advancing racial justice and equity, promoting healing through accountability, and strengthening communities.

We are at a particularly difficult moment right now, facing significant challenges at the federal, state and local levels. At the state level, this challenge includes how we will respond collectively to the horrific murder of Robert Brooks at Marcy Correctional Facility.

Our decades of experience facilitating programs inside gives us tremendous insight into the realities of living and working inside. We are deeply concerned for the safety and well-being of those incarcerated, who have no union to represent them. The killing of Robert Brooks exposed a level of unchecked brutality that is not new to many. We join calls for DOCCS, NYSCOPA, and the legislature to take action to address systemic and cultural issues underlying Mr. Brooks' beating and death, which requires a commitment to deep change and accountability. We agree with the following recommendations, among others:

- prioritize the installation and mandatory use of cameras¹;
- require executive staff to be present during the 3pm to 11pm and 11pm to 7am shifts;
- require training that includes on-the-job follow up and is linked to performance evaluation and promotion;
- Implement a zero tolerance approach to harm, harassment, retaliation, abuse, violence, and death of those incarcerated by correctional staff with swift consequences (that can include pay and pension being affected).

Robert Brooks' death echoes the long-called for need for oversight and this is the time to examine, reimagine, and strengthen all of these levers, including OSI, SCOC, and CANY, as

¹ The installation and use of cameras should be closely monitored by an outside entity given the significant delays over the past 10 or more years in installing and using cameras as detailed in [this New York Focus article](#).

well as how they can work together to accomplish the shared goal of compliance with standards and policies to ensure safety, dignity, and humane treatment, as well as staff accountability. The Governor's budget includes allocations to expand CANY and OSI (as well as restructuring the latter). As one concrete next step—but not the only one—the minimum standards that SCOC seeks to enforce must be brought up-to-date to reflect best practices and current, relevant research. It is our understanding that in many areas, the existing standards are insufficient to provide the protection and humanity that people who live in, work in, and visit jails and prisons deserve.

It is painful to support an additional \$400 million going towards security cameras in prisons (and an additional \$18.4 million for body-worn cameras and \$7.2 million to expand and restructure the Office of Special Investigations) when we are begging for \$28 million to be allocated for alternatives to incarceration and reentry services, which can serve about 7 people for every one person sent to state prison. The amount of money we pour into corrections and incarceration with pervasive costly and tragic results demands that we rethink our approach to keeping New Yorkers safe.

We urge the Senate, Assembly, and the Governor to increase investments in communities, and in proven, cost-effective, data-informed solutions; it is a time to protect all New Yorkers from harm, including inside prisons and jails. Community-based providers are critical partners in advancing public safety. Expanded funding is needed to divert people away from jail and prison, address root causes of law-breaking and harm, and set people on a path to success. As part of the [NY ATI/ Reentry Coalition](#), we are asking for an **investment of \$28 million to expand ATI and reentry services** statewide, including in “service deserts,” as detailed in the Coalition's recent report [Unlocking Potential](#).

Programming from Arrest to Reentry

Mitigation and Court Advocacy Services

Before an individual arrives in DOCCS custody, they have been arrested and gone to court. **Osborne's Court Advocacy Services** is our longest-running program. It is staffed by social workers and mental health professionals who aim to provide mitigating factors to the Court when required by defense attorneys. These clients would not otherwise benefit from these critical social work resources in their criminal defense. **In 2024, Court Advocacy Services helped half, or 50.6%, of our clients receive a lesser-incarceratory sentence and more than a third, or 35.8%, receive a non-incarceratory sentence. In total, 324 clients were spared 1,411.36 years of incarceration, a cost savings of over \$162 million.**²

We have recently expanded CAS to Westchester, Rensselaer, Columbia, Greene and Albany counties with offices White Plains and Troy, and with additional funding, hope to expand elsewhere in the State.

² According to the Vera Institute of Justice (2022), the cost of one year in a NY State prison is \$115,000. <https://www.vera.org/the-cost-of-incarceration-in-new-york-state>

Expanding alternatives and mitigation services is consistent with the findings of the most recent and largest survey of victims of violent crime in this country. According to the [2024 report by the Alliance for Safety and Justice](#):

- By a three-to-one margin, victims believe that the most effective way to reduce crime is to create **more jobs and housing** instead of long sentences.
- More than two in three victims believe that mental health and addiction treatment or job training and placement are more effective strategies to stop repeat crimes than long sentences.
- By a nearly two-to-one margin, victims of violence prefer **investment in prevention, crisis assistance, and communities** over spending more on arrests and punishment.
- Two-thirds of crime victims identified mental health and addiction treatment, violence prevention and school-based programs, or emergency shelters and crisis assistance as the most important public safety services to protect in a budget crisis.
- Seven out of ten victims of violence prefer sentencing policies that allow judges to consider the individual circumstances of the crime, the victim, and the defendant over requiring uniform sentence lengths for specific crimes.

Thus, all of Osborne's programs and our policy recommendations reflect the beliefs and preferences of victims and survivors while seeking to support accountability and behavior change in those who have committed harm.

Parenting Programs and Support

Osborne has decades of experience working inside state prisons and NYC jails. We are grateful for the partnership with DOCCS that makes our programs and innovations possible. In the last calendar year:

- Our **19** Hospitality Centers at prisons spanning nearly 300 miles across the state hosted **82,033** visitors.
 - This number is the sum of **65,021** adults and **17,012** children
- Our **5** Family Centers within men's prisons hosted **1,008 unique adult and child** visitors in FY24.
- In FY24 we conducted **523** video visits between children, other family members, and incarcerated people in DOCCS custody at 11 prisons, connecting from our 3 community sites in NYC, Newburgh, and Buffalo.

The success of our programs is clear from these findings from anonymous evaluation surveys from graduates of Osborne's parenting program FamilyWorks:

- 99% of participants would recommend the course to others
- 96% plan to use the information and tools from the program
- 94% plan to have more communication with their children as a result of the program
- More than 90% indicate increased confidence in their role as fathers

Keeping families and their incarcerated loved ones connected and strengthening relationships during incarceration has always been core to our work and values at Osborne. We opened our first Family Center at Sing Sing back in 1986. Today, we operate 5 of them with the support and partnership of DOCCS, and we continue to work with people in the context of family, broadly defined. Back in 2006, we launched the statewide NY Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents (NYCIP) to bring together government agencies and community and faith-based partners to focus on the well-being of children who experience parental incarceration. We advocate for visiting and protecting ways that family members and incarcerated loved ones can stay in touch. Unfortunately, over the past few years, we have seen significant limitations on packages, letters, and visiting. While we share a deep concern over drugs and contraband coming into facilities, we also believe the increased isolation of people inside has significant negative effects that fuel the desperation and depression that is often linked to drug use and relapse. Ending the past practices of allowing personalized packages, and original letters and artwork, has a negative impact on incarcerated people and their children and families, straining the connections that we know are critical for morale and mental health, and for healthy decision making and successful reentry.

Transitional and Pre-release Planning

In addition to longstanding parenting programs, Osborne also currently leads ReentryWorks, a New York City-funded initiative implemented in partnership with DOCCS, that brings Osborne staff into 24 DOCCS facilities across the state on an in-person or virtual basis. Since launching in late 2022, we have served 725 people returning to the five boroughs. We bring our expertise in serving “long termers” and older people to this work as well, which increases our effectiveness. Osborne began implementing the first reentry case management model in the state focused on older people back in 2015. Applying the dual lenses of aging and long-term incarceration is critical, since more than one in 5 people (22%) within DOCCS is now over age 50.³

We are eager to expand ReentryWorks to support people returning to counties outside of NYC. For an additional \$100,000, we could hire an additional Transitional Planner to work with 50 people returning to counties outside of NYC. The cost-savings of reentry planning that starts inside and continues into the community is tremendous.

For all of the programs we operate inside prisons, we are dependent upon DOCCS for the approval and entry of our staff, and literally having keys to the doors we need to walk through. The staffing shortage at DOCCS is affecting our ability to provide programs. Sometimes our staff receive notice in advance that a particular facility’s school building is closed, or programs are canceled; other times, our staff travel the distance and only learn upon arrival that they cannot facilitate their program. Not only does this delay program completion, as a 12-week program turns into a 20-week program, but it is frustrating for our staff and for the people in the programs.

³ This figure is based on the DOCCS Under Custody report from [February 1, 2025](#).

We have heard that recruiting for state and local corrections is challenging, but we strongly advise against lowering the age for these positions. We welcome opportunities to contribute our ideas and recommendations that come from our experience learning about and observing correctional systems in other states and countries, as well as decades of experience working in New York State prisons and jails. We further encourage DOCCS to involve community partners and formerly incarcerated people, as well as current Officers, in developing solutions to the serious staffing shortage problem. It's also important to note that NYS has a very high staffing rate compared with other jurisdictions. According to CANY's staffing dashboard⁴, "There were 2.2 incarcerated people for every uniformed security officer at DOCCS facilities in 2024. New York has among the lowest staff-to-incarcerated-individual ratio of any state."

Implementing Best Practices and Responsive Approaches

Safeguarding Children

Every person in jail and prison has first been arrested. Osborne has been working with police departments over the past 10 years to bring them tools and training so Officers have the skills they need to prevent and minimize trauma to children when a parent is arrested. This work contributed significantly to DCJS enacting a Safeguarding Children accreditation standard in 2023, and to the Governor signing the Child-Sensitive Arrest bill into law this past December 2024.

We have received positive response from Probation and NYC Corrections that this training is needed and relevant for them as well. The training covers tools for interacting with children, understanding the basics of child development, children's trauma and crisis responses, and how to de-escalate and reassure children so as to reduce negative impressions of law enforcement that can last a lifetime.

Age Matters

At Osborne, we serve people across the lifespan. We see the resilience, strengths, and assets of people of every age and we also know—and science confirms—that each age and stage is particular, requiring a tailored and informed approach. According to the DOCCS [Under Custody report from February 1, 2025](#), there are 2,715 people incarcerated who are 24 years old and younger, including 377 who are 18-20. The brains of this group of young adults (also known as "emerging adults") are still developing and all corrections staff should receive training on working with young people, including restorative justice approaches that have been shown to be [effective](#) with them. A 2021 Department of Justice literature review concluded that young people "who participate in restorative justice programs are less likely to reoffend compared with youths who are processed in the juvenile justice system."⁵

Osborne seeks funding for its youth program in Newburgh, NY, called Youth Experience Success!, or YES! Newburgh. The program's federal funding was unexpectedly ended in November 2024. A description is attached to this testimony.

⁴ CANY's dashboard [press release \(September 2024\)](#)

⁵ See Annie E. Casey Foundation: <https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-is-restorative-justice-for-young-people>

At the other end of the life cycle, there are currently 7,412 people in DOCCS custody who are aged 50 and over. This is 22% of the total DOCCS population. We use age 50 to designate someone who is “older” within correctional settings due to accelerated aging, a phenomenon that DOCCS has acknowledged whereby incarcerated people age faster than their community counterparts due to trauma preceding incarceration and during incarceration, and lack of community standard for nutrition, healthcare, and access to exercise. This includes 24 women who are aged 65-plus and 1,331 men who are aged 65-plus. A growing body of research and diverse voices, including former DOCCS Commissioner Annucci in testimony to this body, are drawing attention to the crisis of those aging inside, and calling for their release⁶.

To address the needs of the more than 7,000 older people in DOCCS custody, **we urge the state to invest in hiring its own geriatrician to comprehensively assess both systemic and individual needs of older adults within DOCCS.** This would include an audit of “a day in the life” of someone who is older: taking a shower, getting to and from “chow,” reporting for “count” several times a day, and more. The prison setting is not conducive to safety for an older person and this is not only costly on human terms but also to the Department. We commend DOCCS for creating the Ulster Senior Living Program (serving 52 older people who do not have serious health conditions or challenges) and to build on this and other tailored models to address the needs of older people.

In the community, it is universally recognized that geriatric health care is the most complex care of all specialties. This is largely due to older patients having multiple chronic conditions at once, as well as higher risks of health issues such as falling, dementia, and side effects from medication. Having a geriatrician on staff would help DOCCS make lifesaving and cost-saving decisions in healthcare costs.

Of course, the best way to address this “silver tsunami” is to release more older people, many of whom are long past their minimum sentences. Older people are very costly to the Department to provide care for and the prison system is ill-equipped to meet their needs. They should not be “aging in place” when research supports “aging out of crime.” They are huge assets to their families and communities, and their recidivism rate for new offenses is almost zero. **We call on the legislature to pass the Elder Parole and Fair and Timely Parole bills.**

Elder Reentry

To assist DOCCS in meeting the needs of older people inside, we are seeking \$150,000 for our Elder Reentry Initiative. ERI began in 2014 as a model case management and transition planning model specifically for older people leaving DOCCS facilities. There are three core components to ERI:

- 1) **Geriatric assessment and discharge planning:** Osborne staff work with older adults in Fishkill (which has a Residential Medical Unit and Unit for the

⁶ In 2018, Osborne issued an update of our report, [The High Costs of Low Risk: The Crisis of America's Aging Prison Population](#).

Cognitively Impaired) and via ReentryWorks in 23 other facilities to assess individual needs and develop a tailored release plan. We provide an escort upon release from facilities in the Hudson Valley and NYC regions.

- 2) **Implementing integrated care management in the community:** Osborne staff work with returning elders and assist them to connect and remain connected to needed services, including appropriate housing, medical, and behavioral health care (including longterm and nursing home care), benefits and work opportunities and other needed services, including services available through senior centers.
- 3) **Improving provider receptivity and access to needed services by:**
 - a) **Developing partnerships between reentry programs and providers of services for older adults** to increase referrals and advocating for the expansion of services, such as safe and appropriate housing options and responses to the opioid epidemic, which is particularly likely to affect older adults whose substance use history poses particular risk;
 - b) **Conducting outreach** to gerontologists, older adult service providers, nursing homes, assisted living and palliative care providers, and mental health clinicians who serve elders to increase sensitivity, lower stigma, and provide assistance on cases and specific challenges of working with older reentering adults;
 - c) **Designing and delivering cross-training workshops and webinars for service providers in the fields of aging and corrections/criminal justice.**

Expand Services in Western New York

In 2019, Osborne opened our Buffalo office, launching our FamilyWorks Buffalo programs. They have been generously supported by consistent funding from Senator Kennedy and now championed by Senator Baskin, and we hope the Senate will continue to fund our program in Western New York. This multifaceted program is meeting unmet needs greater than our current resources. The programs are designed to provide support to children of arrested and incarcerated parents, including video visiting, youth afterschool groups and activities, caregiver support, restorative circles for community members, and training for schools and local providers on the impact of parental incarceration. We have been welcomed into the local community of providers, and could do even more with increased funding in particular to add a clinician to the team to address the traumatic experiences of many children we serve, and expand our innovative Kinship Reentry Housing model (described below) to Western New York.

Reentry Housing Models

Osborne now has an array of reentry housing in NYC and soon, in Newburgh, ranging from transitional supportive housing to permanent supportive housing. Highlighted here are two of our innovative models: the first transforming a former prison into a reentry center and the second providing subsidies to families to welcome loved ones back home from incarceration.

Fulton Community Reentry Center: supportive transitional housing

As you may know, Osborne successfully advocated to take ownership of the former Fulton prison in the Bronx with the plan of transforming it into a community and reentry center. We opened our doors last April 2024. Similar to the Fortune Society's Castle Gardens, Fulton is a 140-bed transitional housing facility for formerly incarcerated older men who have been away for many years, would otherwise be without housing, and will benefit from support to reacclimate to a changing, fast-paced, digital world. Fulton will offer an array of programming, as well as housing specialists to assist people in the daunting task of finding permanent housing.

Kinship Reentry: investing in families

The Kinship Reentry Housing Program addresses two intertwined challenges for people returning from incarceration: safe and stable housing, and reunification with loved ones in the community. Since 2016, 40% of people released from state prisons to NYC are discharged directly to shelters, amounting to an average of 3,500 people each year at a cost of \$138 per day, which comes to an annual cost of \$176 million. Many have families who are excited to welcome them home but may lack the financial resources to do so, or who may need support to navigate the reentry process.

To interrupt the cycle of homelessness and incarceration and divert people from the shelter system, Osborne has created an innovative model that supports families who welcome their formerly incarcerated loved ones into their homes after their release from prison. Based on the kinship foster care model that allows relatives who are fostering children to receive the same support that unrelated foster parents receive, Kinship Reentry addresses the underlying challenges that may discourage families from offering people coming home from prison a safe place to land.

Services for families include:

- \$500 monthly cash assistance for up to 12 months to help offset the financial costs of housing a formerly incarcerated family member;
- Case management and counseling to support families in the reunification process, delivered by credible messenger staff who draw from their own experiences welcoming a loved one home;
- Home visits and advocacy for families, including advocacy with landlords to address unsafe living conditions;
- Financial literacy education and financial planning for the end of the 12-month cash assistance program; and
- Service coordination with the formerly incarcerated person's reentry services provider.

Since launching Kinship in 2021, 235 families have fully enrolled and we have an 85% successful completion rate and close to zero recidivism. A total of 135 families have successfully completed the 12-month Kinship program; 75 are currently enrolled and active. A research team from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago is evaluating Kinship Reentry for cost effectiveness and its impact on family outcomes.

To bring Kinship Reentry to Buffalo, the Erie County Sheriff's Office recently received a federal grant, for which Osborne is a subcontractor. We are excited about this but uncertain of the status of this funding in the current environment. We would also like to expand this cost-effective model in Western NY. Thus, **we are seeking \$325,000 to serve 25 families in Buffalo**. This is a nominal cost of \$13,000 per family (far less expensive than entering the shelter system) and produces positive results and successful reentry. This could be funded through the \$50 million allocated in the Governor's budget for anti-poverty initiatives in Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse.

While we know we need more affordable housing throughout the state, we cannot only build our way out of the housing crisis. We must create and support the ability of families to take in their loved ones when they come home. Kinship Reentry is a solution worth investing in, replicating, and taking to scale throughout the state.

Policy and Legislation⁷

Proximity Implementation

Over the past 10 years, the overall population of those in DOCCS custody decreased significantly, and the "county of conviction" (a rough proxy for where people who are incarcerated come from) has shifted as well. Currently, about 50% of men and 60% of women come from outside NYC and its suburbs. This reality has been important to the implementation of the Proximity Law, which went into effect in 2021. To date, DOCCS has moved more than 5,000 parents of minor children closer to their children, including 1,764 parents between June 2023 and May 2024.⁸ This is huge and to be applauded. The most recent report did not include information on the wait time to be moved closer nor how many parents were approved for transfer but waiting. We also wonder if the staffing shortage is causing delays in transferring parents closer. Location- and thus the amount of time from approval to transfer- affects children's access to their parents and in the case of parents whose children are in foster care, can affect their parental rights.

Prison Closures

Where people in DOCCS custody come from should be taken into consideration when prison closures are considered. We support adjusting the size of the New York prison system, including closing prisons, to be responsive to the need and also guided by evidence that demonstrates that more incarceration does not make us safer, and many victims and crime survivors want other responses including greater trauma services for themselves and their families.

Though two prisons were closed last year, the possibility of further closures exists. We urge the state to make these decisions carefully, and with consideration for the safety of those living and visiting the facility, as well as DOCCS staff concerns and fiscal implications for the surrounding community. The process for determining which prisons close should include the input of formerly incarcerated people and their families, and an examination of grievances, use of force, and

⁷ Osborne's 2025 legislative and policy priorities can be found [HERE](#)

⁸ DOCCS issued its 2024 [Proximity to Minor Children report](#) in February 2025.

assaults on those incarcerated. We also urge consideration of specialized programs or uniqueness of facility. For example, Fishkill should not be considered as it has a Unit for the Cognitively Impaired, and Taconic should not be considered as it is the only medium security prison for women within 7 hours of NYC, unless a medium security wing were opened at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility.

Parole

We also urge the legislature to:

- Fully staff the Board of Parole with commissioners who believe in rehabilitation and transformation. There are currently 5 vacancies on the Board.
- Monitor parole release rates for older people. Currently, older people are denied release at the same rate as people of younger and other ages, despite the fact that they score low on the COMPAS risk assessment and have near zero recidivism rates. An over-weighting of the nature of the crime—the one factor that cannot be changed no matter how long someone is incarcerated—no doubt contributes to this, but is counter to the parole regulations, which require consideration of other factors.
- Monitor racial disparities in parole release rates and why release rates are so low⁹. The Board currently denies almost two-thirds of people who come before them, despite the fact that almost all have served their minimum sentence. Repeated parole denials can mean that someone serves almost twice their minimum sentence, which was not the intention of the statute nor the sentencing judge. [A recent study](#) specifically looked at NY State Board of Parole decisions using an algorithm that “looked at 91 variables to predict crime risk” that included “age, minimum and maximum sentence, prison type, race, time in prison, previous arrests and other criteria,” and concluded:

“We conservatively estimate the board could have more than doubled the release rate without increasing the total or violent felony arrest rate. And they could have achieved these gains while simultaneously eliminating racial disparities in release rates.”¹⁰

- Invest in digitizing the parole process so this is not a paper-based system and restore in-person parole interviews.
- Examine the process of allowing commissioners to continue to serve on the Board of Parole long after their terms have expired. Currently, 11 out of 16 commissioners have expired terms, including several with terms that expired many years ago.

We urge the Senate and Assembly to pass the following bills:

Protect In-Person Visits Bill ([A4603](#)) protects in-person visits at state and local correctional facilities, ensuring that in-person visiting is offered during accessible hours and that video conferencing cannot replace in-person visits, an alarming trend across the country that is

⁹ See NYU’s report [The Problem with Parole \(2023\)](#)

¹⁰ See “Artificial Intelligence Could Aid in Evaluating Parole Decisions,” (2023) [HERE](#).

encouraged by for-profit companies. The Senate passed this bill the past four years and we urge the legislature to pass it immediately.

Compassion and Reproductive Equity (CARE) Act ([S4583/A4879](#)) promotes the well-being of babies by requiring correctional facilities to provide basic standards of pre- and postnatal care for incarcerated individuals who are pregnant. It institutes universal, science-based conditions in correctional facilities for bonding, promoting positive outcomes for babies who remain with their incarcerated parents during the critical bonding period of the first year of life.

Fair and Timely Parole Bill ([S159/A127](#)) requires the state to show that an individual poses a current and unreasonable risk of violating the law and a threat to public safety in order to deny parole release once they have reached their minimum sentence. The bill also requires the Board of Parole to consider all evidence of rehabilitation and, when determining unreasonable risk to public safety, to not solely and primarily rely on the seriousness of the crime, correcting the current injustice of prioritizing the nature of the original crime to determine release.

Elder Parole Bill ([S454/A514](#)) would allow individuals 55 years of age and older who have served 15 years or more a chance to go before the Board of Parole, even though they have not yet reached their minimum sentence or would not otherwise be parole eligible. At great expense to taxpayers and the state, approximately one in five incarcerated individuals is now aged 50 and older, representing a four-fold increase in the past 10 years. Incarcerating older people does not make us safer (as noted earlier, recidivism rates for those over 60 for new offenses are close to zero) and deprives their community of wisdom, contributions, and leadership.

Transitional Reentry Health ([S614/A1008](#)) would require the state to develop a process to enroll all incarcerated individuals into Medicaid, and require all correctional facilities to provide individuals with information about enrollment. It also allows a 60-day presumptive enrollment window in the community post-release.

Reentry Assistance Bill ([A193](#)) addresses the inadequate longstanding practice of providing people with \$40 “at the gate” upon release from prison. It establishes a reentry fund to provide stipends to individuals released from a New York State prison, setting them up for success by providing cash assistance. The first payment is provided by DOCCS at release, with subsequent payments distributed by community supervision agencies, up to a total of \$2,550 per person.

We also urge passage of the bills in the **Communities Not Cages, Youth Justice and Opportunities Act**, and **Justice Roadmap** platform of essential bills.¹¹

Finally, we urge New York to continue to pursue applying for the Federal Medicaid waiver for those incarcerated; this would cover certain needed services for up to 90 days prior to the individual’s expected release date. As per the [CMS Memo](#) (January 2024), “New York is working to align its request with the April 17, 2023 SMDL #23-003,

¹¹ Osborne’s full 2025 Policy Priorities are detailed [HERE](#).

entitled “Opportunities to Test Transition-Related Strategies to Support Community Reentry and Improve Care Transitions for Individuals Who Are Incarcerated.” We hope NY continues to pursue this important route to access healthcare coverage for those incarcerated.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Attached Funding Requests:

Buffalo FamilyWorks: \$250,000 to support expanded youth programming for young people whose parents are incarcerated, and the addition of a clinical staff person.

YES! Newburgh: \$250,000 to replace federal funding that supported services to young people affected by the opioid crisis, parental addiction, and/or incarceration.



Request for Program Funding

Program Name: FamilyWorks Buffalo, a program of Osborne Buffalo

FY26 amount requested: \$250,000 annually

About the Program: Since opening its doors in 2019, Osborne’s FamilyWorks Buffalo has grown to become an indispensable resource for Western New York families affected by incarceration. Since its inception, the program has been supported by then-Senator Tim Kennedy (now Congressman Kennedy), who saw the local need and dedicated \$180,000 per year in State funding to support the direct services for children and families affected by incarceration. Since this time, Osborne’s Buffalo office has grown not only in services provided but also in community partnerships, providing training (including to the entire Buffalo Police Department), and becoming a valued and trusted voice on numerous local and regional task forces and coalitions. We seek ongoing and expanded state funding to be able to meet the needs of Buffalo’s children and families impacted by incarceration.

Program Components include:

- Video visiting: connecting families to their loved ones in 11 State prisons for quality 45-minute sessions in a comfortable, supportive environment.
- Youth Experience Success! (YES!): a leadership and life skills program for young people 12 to 15 affected by a family member’s incarceration.
- Buffalo Leaders: a leadership program for young people 16 to 19 affected by a family member’s incarceration including exposure to college and career pathways.
- Community Outreach and Restorative Circles
- Training and Technical Assistance

- Partnerships, Councils and Task Forces

Our program components have been expanding to meet the needs expressed by children and families. This includes supporting our participants' college aspirations through a partnership with the Give Back Foundation, which provides full scholarships to 4 colleges in NYS to qualifying youth in our programs. Starting in January 2025, we will be able to offer mentoring to the children and young people in our programs through a federal grant, and we are subcontractors with Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Erie, Niagara, and the Southern Tier. Big Brothers. Big Sisters will also refer their mentees to our programs for additional support.

The Need: Osborne established an office in Buffalo to address the significant, yet unaddressed impact of parental incarceration on children and families. There are particularly disparate and high incarceration rates in Genesee-Moselle, Delvan Grider, Fillmore-Leroy, Masten Park, Schiller Park, and MLK Park where residents, for example, are incarcerated at a rate of more than 1,000 per 100,000 people, compared to a state-wide rate of 193 per 100,000.¹² This alarming disparity speaks to the historical and present-day structural racism baked into the criminal legal system. Nearly seven hundred parents of minor children currently incarcerated in NYS prisons were convicted in Erie County, leaving hundreds of children in need of support and services. Within an hour's drive of the city stand seven New York State prisons, 6 for men and the largest women's prison in NYS; these 7 facilities hold more than 6,560 individuals,¹³ including 2,250 self-reported parents of minor children.¹⁴

The incarceration of a household member has been recognized as one of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that can negatively affect adult health outcomes. However, supportive adults, strong family relationships, programs, opportunities, and positive peer relationships can all buffer against these. These are the protective factors that Buffalo FamilyWorks provides.

Our Impact: FamilyWorks Buffalo works to address the negative effects that arrest and incarceration have on Buffalo's children, families, and communities, and to support children in growing into healthy, stable adults. In New York State's 2023 Fiscal Year, we provided direct support to 56 families. Specifically:

- 32 families participated in 171 free video visits connecting them with parents at 11 New York State prisons;
- 27 young people - aged 12 to 19 - attended afterschool programs that combined positive youth development and family support with leadership development;
- 12 family counseling sessions/restorative justice circles were held; and
- 23 families received vital material support.

¹² Prison Policy Initiative. 2021. Where People in Prison Come From: Buffalo Neighborhood Appendix.

https://www.prisonpolicy.org/origin/ny/2020/buffalo_neighborhood.html.

¹³ The 7 prisons near Buffalo are: Collins, Wende, Attica, Wyoming, Groveland, Orleans, Albion. NYS DOCCS. November 2024. Under Custody Report: Profile of Under Custody Population as of November 1, 2024.

https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/11/2024_11_01-uc-profile.pdf

¹⁴ NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). 2023. Proximity to Minor Children Legislative Report. <https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/10/2023-proximity-to-minor-children-legislative-report-final.pdf>.

Our impact extends into developing capacity to reduce trauma to children and minimize the effects of having an incarcerated parent. Osborne has become a relied upon partner in supporting local organizations and government agencies through training and technical assistance. We provide training to schools, social workers, and law enforcement on the impact of arrest and incarceration on children, and provide concrete tools for promoting positive outcomes. We partnered with the University of Buffalo to design a training curriculum, and have trained the entire Buffalo Police Department (BPD), the Erie County Sheriff's Office, and the Tonawanda and Cheektowaga Police Departments. We also established a partnership with the Law Enforcement Training Academy at Erie County Community College to provide twice-annual training in Safeguarding Children, reaching all police recruits in the county. Finally, we successfully worked with the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services to add a new accreditation standard requiring the 168 accredited police departments across the state to have a written policy and provide training to safeguard children when a parent is arrested.

Our Request: FamilyWorks Buffalo was launched with support from State Senator Tim Kennedy, who ensured we received an allocation of \$180,000 in Senate funding each year for 5 years. We are looking to continue and expand this support, and seeking \$250,000 in FY26. This support has been essential to our capacity to offer services provided by no other organization in Western New York. The increase in requested funds would allow us to grow from one to two Family Services Specialists and to hire a full-time Program Assistant to manage the growing number of programs and participants we are serving.

We recently received funding as a subcontractor on a federal OJJDP Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents grant, and are also subcontracted partners on a new federal grant with the Erie County Jail and Peaceprint's Project Blue to launch Kinship Reentry (an innovative reentry housing solution). While these are exciting and expand our program offerings, we also need to expand our staffing and infrastructure to grow proportionately, and to meet the increased expenses that come with serving more children and families (including greater expenses for food, stipends, and - importantly, in an area with a very limited bus system - transportation). We are excited about these new grants and also concerned that changes at the federal level might negatively affect this new funding.

About the Organization: Founded in 1933 to honor the legacy of prison reformer Thomas Mott Osborne, the Osborne Association serves individuals, families, and communities affected by the criminal legal system. Through our programs, we offer opportunities for people to heal from and repair harm, restore their lives, and thrive. We challenge systems rooted in racism and retribution and fight for policies and practices that promote safety, justice, and liberation.

There is no other nonprofit that spans so much of New York State and New York City's criminal justice and correctional systems than Osborne. Our services reach 39 of New York's 42 state prisons, all eight jails on NYC's Rikers Island, and criminal courts in all five boroughs of New York City and in Westchester, Green, Rensselaer, and Columbia Counties. Four community offices include our headquarters in the South Bronx to offices in Brooklyn, Newburgh, and Buffalo, with satellite locations in Westchester and Troy.



Request for Program Funding

Program Name: Youth Experience Success! (YES!) Newburgh

Amount requested: \$250,000 annually

The Program

Youth Experience Success! (YES!) Newburgh is the only program in the region that supports the positive development and future success of children with incarcerated parents and/or parents who have opioid use disorders. Osborne established the program in 2021, five years after we opened a Newburgh office and four decades after we first established a presence in the Hudson Valley to serve incarcerated people and their families. In November 2024, we learned that despite excellent performance and tremendous response from young people and their families, the federal funding for this essential program - which was serving nearly thirty young people and their families - *would not be renewed*. **We are urgently seeking \$250,000 annually to sustain the program going forward.**

The Need: Osborne opened our Newburgh office in 2016. Since this time, we have come to know the city's many strengths, including its rich cultural heritage, dedicated parents, and resilient youth. We have met and hired passionate staff, served vibrant young people eager for opportunities, growth, connection and success, and built relationships with caring parents who want their children to achieve their dreams. Yet, there are also many challenges. Once deemed "the worst city to live in New York State,"¹⁵ Newburgh has been included among the 50 most violent cities in the US,¹⁶ showing a crime rate higher than 95% of other cities¹⁷ and the third-highest incarceration rate of any city, town, or village in our state.¹⁸ The city's poverty rate of 26.5% is twice the national rate and nearly double the rate statewide.¹⁹ This means that many children encounter adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) which can negatively affect their adult health as well as their current mental and physical health. As one far-too-common ACE, parental incarceration has been shown to increase childhood homelessness and disrupted housing, lower school performance and a heightened risk of leaving school,²⁰ and risky and "health-harming" behaviors in young adulthood.²¹

Newburgh does not currently have the services and programs in place to meet the needs of its young people and families. Osborne helps to fill this gap, and the response to our YES! program

¹⁵ Lina Wu (2020). Is Newburgh Really the Worst Place in NYS? Lina Wu, *Times of Hudson Valley*.

¹⁶ US DOJ, Office of Justice Programs. (2019). Project Safe Neighborhoods.

<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/project-safe-neighborhoods-evaluation-city-newburghs-group-violence>

¹⁷City Data: Crime Rate in Newburgh, NY. <https://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-Newburgh-New-York.html>. Retrieved 11/24.

¹⁸Prison Policy Initiative. Number of people in prison in 2020 from every New York city or village.

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/origin/ny/2020/city.html>.

¹⁹ US Census Bureau. Quick Facts: Newburgh, NY.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newburghcitynewyork/PST045222>

²⁰The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2016). A Shared Sentence: Children with Incarcerated Parents.

²¹ Heard-Garris, N. et al. . (2018). Health care use and health behaviors among young adults with a history of parental incarceration. *Pediatrics*. Volume 142, number 3, 2017-4314

was truly astounding. Young people voted with their feet and have come to count on the program for support, community, opportunities, healing, and motivation.

About the Program: YES! Newburgh is an afterschool program that serves young people over a three-year period. Program elements evolve over this time, with participants progressing from the foundational curricula and case management (Year 1) to roles as advisors, group facilitators, and youth ambassadors (Years 2-3), to implementing plans for post-program engagement in education, training, or employment (Year 3). We use multiple modalities, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, substance use disorder education, training in nonviolent conflict resolution, trauma screening, crisis intervention, and family support. We rely on community partners to amplify our impact, including Drone Cadets, which provides instruction aimed at earning a pilot's license, and the Give Back Foundation, which offers full college scholarships and college mentoring to eligible participants. Our impact data show that YES! Newburgh strengthens the young people's relationships with parents and caregivers, involves the youth in their own education, and builds positive peer relationships. By exposing young people to new opportunities, providing a safe and nurturing space, and connecting them with other partner organizations, we are assisting them in realizing their potential and growing into their bright futures.

About the Osborne Association: Founded in 1933, the Osborne Association serves individuals, families, and communities affected by the criminal legal system. Our services reach 39 of New York's 42 state prisons, all jails on Rikers Island, and criminal courts in all five boroughs of New York City and in Westchester, Green, Rensselaer, Albany, and Columbia Counties. Osborne's work spans lifetimes and generations, from the children of incarcerated parents to older adults returning to our communities after decades of incarceration. We base ourselves in communities most affected by historical and present-day structural racism, from our headquarters in the South Bronx, to offices in Brooklyn, Harlem, Newburgh, and Buffalo, to satellite locations in White Plains and Troy.

Osborne has been a pioneer in developing services for children and families affected by incarceration since the 1980s, when we established FamilyWorks, *the first comprehensive parenting program for men in a state prison anywhere in the country*. Our community-based programming for children and families followed soon after. We now offer programs parallel to YES! Newburgh in New York City and Buffalo, video visiting services connecting families from our community offices to parents at 11 NYS prisons, support for formerly incarcerated parents, and civic engagement and leadership training for youth.

Funding Request: An allocation of \$250,000 annually. These funds will cover the cost of program staff, program space, staff and participant travel, food for the young participants, recreational activities, participant incentives, and incidental costs. A full budget is available.

Contact:

Tiffany Myrick, Director, Children, Youth & Family Services

tmyrick@osborneny.org

Tanya Krupat, VP, Policy & Advocacy

tkrupat@osborneny.org