



Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
188 State Street Legislative Office Building, Room 907  
Albany, NY 12247

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie  
188 State Street Legislative Office Building 932  
Albany, NY 12248

Senator Shelly Mayer, Chair of Committee on Education  
188 State Street Legislative Office Building, Room 509  
Albany, NY 12247

Assemblymember Michael Benedetto, Chair of Committee on Education  
188 State Street Legislative Office Building, Room 836  
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Senate and Assembly Leaders:

The **undersigned NYC Supervised Visitation Working Group** supports the allocation of \$20 million towards the expansion of supervised visitation services statewide. We cannot continue to let parents and children be separated because they can't afford to pay for access.

The Working Group was formed this year, under the leadership of the Children's Law Center ("CLC"), to raise awareness around the needs of family-court-involved children who have been exposed to family abuse. The Working Group represents 15 organizations, all of which work with families engaged in family court proceedings. Some Working Group members represent parents, some represent children, and some provide supervised visitation services. We share a commitment to supporting justice for families.

The Working Group is deeply concerned about the lack of supervised visitation available for families. The lack of this critical resource is currently harming children and families and creating unnecessary costs for the courts caused by delayed proceedings. The Working Group members believe that a clear and consistent system of providing these services is essential to the well-being of children and to the fair and equitable functioning of our courts.

### **This Crisis Impacts Families Every Day**

The undersigned organizations practice in the New York City courts and have daily experience of the woeful lack of resources available to effectuate supervised visitation orders in New York City custody, visitation and divorce cases. We estimate that in NYC alone, every year at least **8,750 families need some form of supervised visitation.**

Right now, NYC can serve less than half of the families seeking supervised visitation at any given term; most must wait months for services, which harms parent/child relationships and delays court proceedings; and families with the means to pay receive services faster, causing disparate treatment of families living in poverty. In short, literally thousands of low-income children have no safe way to maintain contact with both parents during or after a custody or visitation case.

### **This Crisis Further Harms Children Already Suffering Trauma**

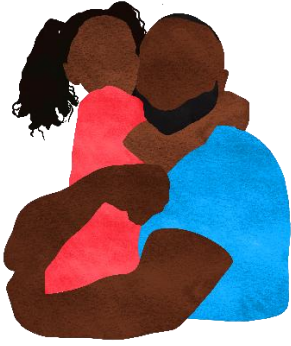
Most cases referred to supervised visitation services have a history of domestic violence. When children have been exposed to domestic violence in the home, they can experience post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep disturbances, aggression, passivity, poor education outcomes or desensitization to violence. These negative outcomes can last even after separation. These risks make access to safe and supervised visits that much more vital to protect children from ongoing abuse while enabling them to maintain contact and begin to heal.

### **This Crisis Negatively Impacts the Courts, and the Delivery of Justice**

Jurists in Family and Supreme Court view professionally supervised visitation as a key resource for families, and as a source of information for them in their decision-making process. When programs are not available, judges must choose between ordering no visits at all or exploring alternative solutions that may not have the same safety or reporting measures available with programs. Overwhelmed providers also can delay proceedings as they struggle to report to the courts in a timely fashion.

**The Ask: It is imperative that the State budget include at least \$20 million toward the expansion of supervised visitation in New York State.** This funding will support children and families and lead to a more fair and just family justice system.

**Signed:**



**Arab American Family Services Center**

**The Children's Law Center**

**Comprehensive Family Services**

**Domestic Violence Project of the Urban  
Justice Center**

**Family Legal Care**

**Her Justice**

**JCCA**

**Lawyers For Children**

**The Legal Aid Society**

**NYLAG**

**OHEL Children's Home and Family  
Services**

**Safe Horizon**

**Sakhi for South Asian Survivors**

**Sanctuary for Families**

**Shalom Task Force**

**Violence Intervention Program**