

**REPORT OPPOSING PROPOSED REDUCTIONS
TO THE VISITATION SCHEDULE AT NEW YORK'S
MAXIMUM SECURITY CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES
IN THE 2017-2018 EXECUTIVE BUDGET**

The New York City Bar Association's Committee on Corrections and Community Reentry opposes the 2017-18 Executive Budget proposal to reduce the visitation schedule at New York's 17 maximum security correctional facilities from seven days a week to three.

The New York City Bar Association ("the City Bar") is an independent, non-governmental organization of over 24,000 lawyers, judges, law professors, and government officials from the United States and 50 other countries. The conditions of confinement in New York's jails and prisons, including programs that contribute to successful transition from incarceration to the community, are a matter of long-standing concern for the City Bar.

Visitation nurtures personal relationships and produces both short- and long-term positive outcomes for people who are incarcerated and their loved ones, and for maintaining order at the facilities. Limiting opportunities for visitation with incarcerated loved ones will mean fewer and less meaningful visits for many. Allowing friends and family members—who often travel many hours from home to the facility—to visit any day of the week reduces long lines, wait times, and crowding in visiting rooms, and thus gives them more quality time with their loved one.

Social science research demonstrates that when people who are incarcerated receive support in maintaining relationships with their loved ones, the benefits are numerous. For the incarcerated person, visits result in fewer behavioral infractions and decreased risk of reoffending upon release, and for incarcerated parents who keep in touch with their children, lower rates of depression, anxiety, and stress.¹ For their children, who are more likely to exhibit symptoms of trauma as compared with other children and to struggle with substance use and mental health

¹ For more on the connection between family contact and reduced behavioral infractions, see John Wooldgzredge, "Inmate Experiences and Psychological Well-Being," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 26, no. 2 (1999): 235-50. For more on the connection between family contact and recidivism, see Grant Duwe and Valerie Clark, "Blessed Be the Social Tie that Binds: The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 24, no. 3 (2013): 271-96. For more on how visiting benefits children with incarcerated parents, see Julie Poehlmann et al., "Children's Contact With Their Incarcerated Parents: Research Findings and Recommendations," *American Psychologist* 65, no. 6 (2010): 575-98.

problems, the quality of parental visitation can lessen the trauma of parental incarceration.²

While video visitation has the potential to provide families and friends the opportunity to see their loved ones who are incarcerated without the burdens of travel to often faraway correctional facilities, video should not supplant in-person visitation for those who can make the journey. The cost of video visitation, which is often passed through to its users, can be prohibitively high for families, and poor audio and visual quality can impede meaningful communication.³ In some cases, vendors who provide the technology for video visitation require elimination of in-person visitation altogether as a condition of the contract. Moreover, video visitation cannot, of course, replace the physical connection that is made during an in-person visit, through actions as simple yet powerful as a hug or holding hands.

New York has long been a leader in encouraging connections between people who are incarcerated and their loved ones, and promoting successful reentry upon release from prison. In-person visitation promotes individual and family well-being during and after incarceration, helps to limit the strain and stress of incarceration on children, parents, and spouses, and reduces the risk of institutional infractions and recidivism. We urge the Legislature and Governor not to make cuts that will burden some of New York's most vulnerable families and endanger the success of visitation programs in promoting institutional and public safety.

Corrections and Community Reentry Committee
Alex Lesman, Chair

March 2017

² See Joyce Arditti and Jyoti Savla, "Parental Incarceration and Child Trauma Symptoms in Single Caregiver Homes," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 24, No. 3 (2015): 551–61.

³ See Léon Digard, Margaret diZerega, Allon Yaroni, and Joshua Rinaldi. *A New Role for Technology? Implementing Video Visitation in Prison* (New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice, 2016), available at <http://archive.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/video-visitation-in-prison.pdf>.