

**Testimony to the New York State  
Joint Hearing of the Senate and Assembly Corrections Committees**

**on the**

**Safety of Persons in Custody, Transparency, and Accountability  
within State Correctional Facilities**

**May 14, 2025**

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



Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for holding this hearing. 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 Brooklyn, the Bronx, Buffalo, Newburgh, White Plains, and Troy. 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. We have Family Centers in five prisons, and run the Hospitality Centers in 19 prisons. 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 our insights into the current challenges faced and our related recommendations; both are based on our longstanding and broad experience working with NYS prisons, collaborating with DOCCS to provide an array of programming, and continuous learning from individuals, families, and our staff (many of whom are formerly incarcerated). We thank DOCCS for decades of partnership and for the groundbreaking programs and initiatives we have implemented over the years, including the first parenting program for men in NYS (FamilyWorks was launched in 1986), and Family Centers inside of visiting rooms. We have also collaborated with DOCCS on important legislative changes such as the Proximity Law (or Proximity to Minor Children Transfer) passed in 2020, which has led to more than 5,000 incarcerated parents being closer to their children.<sup>1</sup>

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 and accountability, and strengthening communities. **We believe prisons are harmful places for everyone – those who live there, work there, and visit there. And we believe we are at a crossroads where we need to both address the daily crisis and also pull back to examine the big picture and rethink our strategy and approach.**

#### **Current Context:**

The 2025 NY State prison landscape looks significantly different than it did 20 years ago, and 50 years ago. Our approach (policies and practices) should adapt to be responsive to the current times and needs. We support and look forward to DCJS convening a "Reimagining Prison" initiative and urge this to include the perspectives of those directly affected – including families – and to begin convening very soon.

Our responses and solutions to the current crisis must acknowledge and be grounded in the following realities:

- There has been a significant and commendable reduction in the prison population in NY State from a high in 1999 of over 70,000 to the current census of just over 32,000 (which

---

<sup>1</sup> [Proximity to Minor Children Report 2024](#)

is still significantly more than the 12,000 census of 1970). Importantly, this reduction in the prison population coincides with a reduction in crime, demonstrating that it is possible to both decarcerate and promote public safety.<sup>2</sup>

- The incarcerated population has decreased by 56.3% since 1999 and uniformed staffing has decreased by 48.6% over the same time, which reframes the current staffing “crisis” as recalibrating to the changing landscape. Further, according to CANY’s staffing dashboard<sup>3</sup>, “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.”

Staffing and Population Differences				
	12/31/99	5/1/25	Numeric Difference	Percent Change
<b>Correction Officers, Sergeants, Lieutenants</b>	22,112	11,359	10,753	-48.6%
<b>Incarcerated Individuals</b>	72,649	31,694	40,955	-56.3%

DOCCS [Fact Sheet May 2025](#)

- Those incarcerated in State prisons come from across the State, and reflect more geographic diversity with more incarcerated women now coming from outside NYC and the Westchester area.<sup>4</sup>
- The percentage of the prison population (about 22%) that is older (age 50 and up) is growing, which is a result of extreme sentences and narrow release mechanisms, including parole denials. With research on “aging out of crime” and generally low COMPAS scores (DOCCS’ measure of assessing risk for re-offending), one would expect higher parole release rates for older people, but this is not what we have seen.
  - We recently hired a formerly incarcerated individual who came home after serving 49 years. He was denied parole 13 times and served an additional 26 years after reaching his minimum sentence. This is an estimated cost of \$2.86 million to the State and taxpayers *after* he reached parole eligibility. The community is not safer having incarcerated this person 26 years past when the judge said he could be released; taxpayers are unconscionably poorer; and he is haunted by additional decades of trauma and exacerbated chronic conditions.
- In considering what victims and survivors want, it’s important to consider the findings of a [2024 report by the Alliance for Safety and Justice](#), which include:
  - 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.

<sup>2</sup> See [How One State Reduced Crime and Incarceration \(2010\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> CANY’s dashboard [press release \(September 2024\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> It is common to continue to hear people, including elected officials, refer to the groundbreaking Seven Neighborhood Study from the early 1990s by the (incarcerated) members of the Otisville Think Tank which importantly demonstrated that most people in NYS prisons came from 7 NYC neighborhoods. However, this is no longer the case in 2025.

- 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.

Alternatives to incarceration, including restorative justice programs, are far more cost-effective than jail or prison, with better outcomes, often including healing for victims, as well. The money saved by investing in these approaches leaves more money to invest in providing victims services as well as giving victims and survivors choices about what their justice looks like.

- The isolation of people inside during COVID-19 was extreme and terrifying. Since that time, policy choices to respond to contraband (including drugs) and violence have been made that further isolate people and punish families without first analyzing the root causes of the identified problems. This contributes to depression and hopelessness, which can in turn fuel drug use and violence. We strongly urge DOCCS and the legislature to recognize the importance of, nurture, and protect relationships by:
  - Re-examining the ban on packages;
  - Utilize technology and other mechanisms to allow letters and drawings from children to reach their parents rather than photocopying all mail;
  - Examine the use of body scanners, train staff, and monitor the increased use of non-contact visits (this is discussed further below);
  - Restore 7 day/week visits at max facilities (76 organizations signed a letter to Commissioner Martuscello last week calling for the full restoration of visits)

### **Staffing Challenges:**

The staffing shortage can also be reframed as a need to recalibrate and approach staff deployment differently. While DOCCS and officers experience a shortage of staff and 2,000 officers were recently fired as a result of their illegal striking, DOCCS remains one of the most well-staffed corrections systems in the country, with a staff-to-incarcerated person ratio more than double that of the average for state prisons across the country.<sup>5</sup> The highest percentage of DOCCS staff vacancies (as of 2024) are actually in health services (25%), support services (18%), and program services (16%), compared with an 11% vacancy rate for Officers.<sup>6</sup> This is an invitation to all of us to support DOCCS in creatively and effectively deploying existing staff, assessing roles for other job titles, and designing a system that best supports safety for everyone.

We were very disappointed to see the finalized State budget include the lowering of the age for DOCCS Correction Officers to 18. We wholeheartedly oppose this for many reasons and have outlined these in an addendum to our testimony. Instead of hiring 18-year-olds and limiting their responsibilities, we propose the following as solutions to be explored:

- Raise the upper age above 36 (currently those over age 36 cannot apply to become COs). People can enlist in NY's National Guard up to age 41, and in NY's Naval Militia up to age 67.

<sup>5</sup> According to [this research](#) only Massachusetts has a higher ratio of staff to incarcerated.

<sup>6</sup> See CANY's dashboard: <https://www.correctionalassociation.org/prison-map>

- Conduct a landscape and workforce analysis to strategically close and consolidate prisons, and determine the number and types of staffing needed. There are currently jobs assigned to correction officers that could be done by and may be a better skill-set fit for civilians, social workers, mental health counselors, and peers.
- Release more people who are ready to be released. DOCCS is now invoking CL73, which is a great first step, but this will actually only affect a small number of people (estimated around 300 per quarter). There are many other release levers that should be pulled now to safely release people including increasing parole release, medical parole, clemency and commutations, intensive discharge planning for everyone in DOCCS custody who is past their release date, and lifting the ban on violent convictions for work release eligibility.<sup>7</sup> There are other release mechanisms that are almost never used and could be explored as well, such as conditional release, educational release, industrial training leave, and community service leave. Regarding parole releases, in particular:
  - [A recent study](#) specifically focused on 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.”<sup>8</sup>***

- Shift the culture, expectations, and some of the work hour rules to attract people to apply. Look to other correctional systems that have implemented policies to address this like the State of Maine Department of Corrections’ [personal cell phone use policy](#) (2022).
- To address a culture of violence, including extreme brutality against those incarcerated such as killed Robert Brooks and Messiah Nantwi, and also staff reporting feeling unsafe and needing more tools, bring in outside experts to assist in designing and operating proven violence prevention and drug treatment strategies. Implement positive incentives and rewards to incentivize desired behavior, and fully implement HALT.
- In 2011, Parole merged with corrections to form DOCCS. We hear very little about the parole supervision side of DOCCS. As of December 2024, there were 17,542 people actively on parole.<sup>9</sup> What are the caseloads of parole officers? Below I share some of

---

<sup>7</sup> The exclusion of people with violent convictions as a regular practice must also be re-examined as type of conviction does not correlate to a measure of harm done. In reality this false-proxy of who is safe and who is dangerous keeps many people incarcerated, excluded from opportunities, and on parole for sometimes a lifetime, at very high taxpayer cost.

<sup>8</sup> See “Artificial Intelligence Could Aid in Evaluating Parole Decisions,” (2023) [HERE](#).

<sup>9</sup> See [DOCCS Fact Sheet](#).

what we are seeing on the ground as well as recommendations for transparency and monitoring of practice, including compliance with Executive Law 259(j) and greatly increasing the numbers of people who are safely let off parole.

### **What We See on the Ground**

When programs are up and running (as they were prior to the strike), Osborne is in 39 of the State's 42 prisons. We operate 19 Hospitality Centers, 5 Family Centers, and offer parenting, healthy relationships, connected couples programs, and fatherhood forum in 8 men's prisons, parenting in the largest women's prison (Albion), and discharge planning programs operating in 27 NYS prisons. Last 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.
- 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.
- Since launching ReentryWorks in late 2022, we have served 725 people returning to the five boroughs of NYC.

Since the end of the wildcat strike, we see varying levels of resumption of programs; every facility is different, and every day is different, which makes it hard to plan and implement programs. Two examples below show the varied state of programming:

- At Green Haven, we are planning our parenting graduation for mid-June as we received approval to move forward. You are welcome to attend.
- At Woodbourne (where many staff were striking), our programs are not yet running, our Family Center is not open, and our parenting graduations were canceled.

The lack of programming for months in some places is dire. While we have heard that merit time and parole boards are not counting unfinished programs against people (if they have not completed a program as the result of the strike), the lack of programming and interaction with outside providers affects overall morale, pursuit and completion of goals and transformation, and connection.

Regarding visiting, we are concerned that 7 day/ week visits have not been restored at the 13 maximum security facilities which together house 14,359 people.<sup>10</sup> With these prisons reduced from 7 days of visiting each week to 2, there are high numbers of visitors on weekends. This is a strain on Officers as well as visitors: more people denied visits; longer waits for visiting; and fewer visiting opportunities.

---

<sup>10</sup> See [DOCCS Fact Sheet May 2025](#)

We are also concerned about the use of body scanners that abruptly went into effect on March 22. This was a request of striking officers and was granted to them. Our staff have received phone calls from visitors crying, who were turned away and accused of having drugs on them when they did not. If people refuse the body scanners, but are cleared in other ways, they are to be offered a non-contact visit, but this has limitations such as a maximum of 2 visitors. What are families - a mother and 3 children- supposed to do if only 2 people are allowed to visit, behind a glass partition? This needs to be monitored and staff need to be adequately trained in how to use the scanners. One uniformed DOCCS staff member shared with us, honestly, that they had been trained so long ago they forgot how to interpret what they see through the scanner. Another issue we are hearing about is women being denied visits because their sanitary napkins or tampons are interpreted as drugs.

Osborne has a lot of experience training Corrections Officers who interact with visitors, and creating trauma-informed tools for families affected by incarceration. We could assist DOCCS in creating materials for families, training for COs (not in the technical aspect of the scanners but in interacting with visitors and children). We also recommend DOCCS evaluate the speed and effectiveness of visitor processing with the new technology to optimize both security and visitor experience.

Visiting is such a critical lifeline. While there are Officers and DOCCS staff who support and believe in visiting, an unverified and often pervasive assumption is that visitors are a major source of contraband. This should be corrected; DOCCS should firmly assert and demonstrate in practice that maintaining relationships for those in its custody is a departmental value and priority. DOCCS' states:

*"The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) encourages visits by family and friends, which can be a positive influence during the time a person spends in prison and after their release. Research shows that incarcerated individuals who receive regular visits adjust much better once they are released from prison when the privilege is used to maintain positive relationships. DOCCS wants the visiting experience to be family friendly and positive."*

We applaud the Commissioner who has asserted on many occasions his belief in the importance and positive influence of visiting. This is a time to get back on track and ensure that visiting is happening and that visitors are supported to have a positive experience.

### **Safety and Accountability**

#### *What creates safety?*

In addition to well trained officers, it is also programs, and connections to the outside. It is hope and motivation, role models, and positive incentives. It is receiving responsive and timely healthcare. These items do not necessarily require more Officers.

While the State budget allocated additional money for cameras and body-worn cameras, we urge you, the legislature, to closely monitor the status of the following:

- the installation and mandatory use of fixed and body worn cameras (see below)<sup>11</sup>;
- executive staff being present during the 3pm to 11pm and 11pm to 7am shifts;
- training on using the body scanners that is paired with data on their use, the number of visits denied, and the use of non-contact visits across all facilities.

We also recommend body worn cameras be worn and turned on when Officers are interacting with visitors.

Key to the safety of those incarcerated is a culture change and accountability. We urge 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).
- Officers who don't turn on their camera, turn their camera upward, cover it with their shirt or hand, zip their jackets over their cameras, or otherwise intentionally obstruct the view of their body-worn camera; Officers who turn them on when they should not be for privacy reasons.

### **Transparency**

Transparency is needed in many areas, but I will focus on release mechanisms that are critical in this moment when DOCCS continues to cite a lack of adequate staffing as the reason programs and visits cannot be fully restored. My colleague Laura Roan, Vice President of In-Prison Services at Osborne, has pointed me to the criminologist Dr. Tony Fabelo and his bathtub analogy.<sup>12</sup>

The amount of water in a bathtub depends on the faucet and the drain. The numbers of people in prison are a function of how much water is running in, the water level, and whether the water is draining. DOCCS cannot control how much water comes in (although right now there are close to 1,000 people “stuck” on Rikers awaiting transfer into DOCCS), but they can control how long people stay (through the parole board and medical parole) and how many are released. This section focuses on transparency around release mechanisms, and urges increased use of all options available.

While CL73 is an important effort to release people, and we are working closely with DOCCS on this, in practice it is inequitable and fraught with unintended, troubling consequences. For example, people remain on an outcount and so are technically still in custody, which creates a host of very serious challenges. It also affects very few people. We urge DOCCS, the Governor, and the legislature to work to change the status and limits currently placed on people who would be released via CL73 so this mechanism becomes equitable and supportive. Though unintended, CL73 is currently inequitable for individuals without release housing and without

---

<sup>11</sup> 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](#).

<sup>12</sup> See [this article](#) (2015).

well-resourced family support, and it is dangerous for those with medical conditions and no access to benefits.

With a focus on safely releasing as many people as possible, we urge the use of all release levers possible and examining data related to:

- Parole board releases: Provide parole board with their monthly release rates analyzed in different ways (race, age, gender, geographical, offense type, parole board hearing type)
- Community supervision:
  - Track and make public rates of people being discharged from parole supervision after 2-3 years, and reasons for keeping people on.
  - Track and monitor parole violations for minor technical infractions which are sending people back to Rikers for 10-30 days. This includes for “absconding,” which can mask a person missing their appointment to report to their parole officers for a variety of reasons, including having dementia and not knowing they need to report. If the underlying reason for the infraction is related to addiction, developmental disability, mental illness, cognitive challenge, or aging/dementia, it is not an effective or cost-effective solution to send someone to Rikers over and over and over again. A DOCCS 2024 report states:  
*“Technical Violation – Absconder cases made up the highest proportion of violation cases (51%) created between January 1 and December 31, 2023 (Table 15).”*<sup>13</sup> Given our recent work with people on parole who have been violated for “absconding” for the underlying issues mentioned above, we urge this category be unpacked and the underlying reasons examined and addressed.
  - Exec Law 259(j) requires discretionary review for everyone on parole, every 2-3 years. This means no one should be coming out of the gate with “lifetime parole” yet this is a common practice. We work with many individuals who tell us they are on “lifetime parole” as per their parole officer.
  - Examine current training and performance evaluation for parole officers in the community. We recommend training and refreshers on aging, dementia, developmental disability, mental illness, and substance use, as well as clarifying job duties. According to DOCCS, parole officers are charged with “assisting individuals in transitioning back to the community”<sup>14</sup> but we sometimes hear that people have been told to find their own programs and housing, including people with mental health or cognitive challenges.
- Clemency applications. In 2024, Governor Hochul granted 22 people clemency out of thousands of applications. As has been the pattern, she did so in December rather than reviewing and granting applications throughout the year. We urge an increase in utilization of this important release mechanism.

---

<sup>13</sup> See [this DOCCS 2024 report](#).

<sup>14</sup> See [DOCCS website here](#).

- Medical parole eligibility and applications. In 2022 (the last year there is [DOCCS published data for](#)), DOCCS received 34 applications (slightly up from previous years), conducted 26 interviews and granted 21 releases, of which 15 of these individuals were actually released. Eight people applied who were not interviewed, and 6 people were granted release who were not released- did they die inside? Was a lack of housing the reason they could not be released? According to DOCCS, the most common reason for denying someone medical parole is the seriousness/nature of their offense- the one thing a person cannot change. With the criteria for medical parole being near death, we recommend closely looking at this so that more people can be safely released to die with their family/community around them.<sup>15</sup>

### **Legislation that Would Help Address the Crisis**

Finally, as of the date of this hearing, there is about one month left of this legislative session, and many legislative bills that can significantly address this prison crisis.

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

**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.

**Protect In-Person Visits Bill** ([A4603/ S5307](#)) 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 encouraged by for-profit companies. The Senate passed this bill the past four years and we urge the legislature to pass it immediately. The bill is now in the Assembly Ways & Means Committee, and awaits a full floor vote in the Senate.

**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.

---

<sup>15</sup> Reasons for denial can be found on page 8 of [this 2022 DOCCS report](#).

**Reentry Assistance Bill** ([S6222/A6990](#)) addresses the inadequate long-standing 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.

**Reentry from the Inside Out-** A3934/A3935 recognizes that “reentry begins inside,” prior to release from prison. The two bills that make up RIO are [A3934](#), which would establish a pilot program to provide access to a range of reentry services before and after release, and [A3935](#), which would require DOCCS to coordinate with social service agencies and non-profits to assist with benefits applications before release.

**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.

We also urge passage of the bills in the **Communities Not Cages, Youth Justice and Opportunities Act**, and **Justice Roadmap** platform of essential bills.<sup>16</sup>

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, 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.

## **Conclusion**

Providers like Osborne and other critical stakeholders, are partners in arriving at a better place, one that supports correctional administrators, leaders, and their staff, as well as those inside and their children and families. We look forward to working with the legislature and DOCCS to identify solutions not just to facility-specific situations and day-to-day challenges, but with the big picture and the current context and opportunities in mind. There are deeper reasons why people don’t want to be correction officers that have to do with the system we currently have and how it treats people. A different approach is possible and now is the time to make some bold changes. This is not “us versus them,” but about all of our shared humanity and arriving at a system that addresses harm without inflicting more of it. Thank you.

---

<sup>16</sup> Osborne’s full 2025 Policy Priorities are detailed [HERE](#).

## Addendum: 18 Year Old COs are Not the Answer

### Why Employing 18 Year Olds as COs is NOT a Solution:

- Brain research tells us that our brains are still developing until age 25; 18 year olds are still developmentally more impulsive, less focused on consequences and still developing their identities, and highly influenced by peers:

*“Emerging adults, like younger adolescents, are remarkably malleable. They are still developing impulse control, the ability to anticipate consequences of choices, and the ability to weigh risks and rewards, especially when they are under stress. Brain development during this period means that emerging adults have significant capacity to make positive changes but are also especially vulnerable to trauma.”<sup>17</sup>*

Further,

*“Using driving simulation games, studies have found that the presence of peers significantly increased risk taking among adolescents and emerging adults, but not among adults in their 30s.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, while logical reasoning typically develops by around age 15, “hot cognition,” which includes impulse control and emotional regulation in a stressful situation, continues to develop into the mid-20s.<sup>19</sup>*

- The Governor proposes that COs under age 21 would have limited responsibilities and would not interact with incarcerated people and not carry a firearm. Such positions sound like they do not need to be done by COs. Trained civilians could be hired to do these or other jobs, and a reassessment of the correctional workforce and duties should be done: what jobs are currently done by COs that don't need to be done by a CO?
- The current purported staffing crisis runs parallel (and intertwined with) the current prison environment / culture of violence crisis where staff violence and racism run rampant and are killing those incarcerated. As of 2021, DOCCS facility staff were reported to be 77% white and Central office staff and NYC administration were reported to be 81% white.<sup>20</sup> Racism within facilities and racially- disparate decision-making such as parole releases are well-documented.<sup>21</sup> Adding 18 year old officers who- unless significant efforts were made to shift this, would be majority white as well- to this racialized power structure will only worsen this crisis.

---

<sup>17</sup> YJO Emerging Adult Briefing (2025)

<sup>18</sup> Chein, Jason et al. “Peers increase adolescent risk taking by enhancing activity in the brain's reward circuitry.” *Developmental science* vol. 14,2 (2011)

<sup>19</sup> Barkin, Rachel. [“Hot and Cold Cognition: Understanding Emerging Adults' Cognitive Reasoning.”](#) Columbia Justice Lab (2021).

<sup>20</sup> See DOCCS report, <https://doccs.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/04/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-five-year-strategic-plan-2021-2025.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> See Inspector General's report (2022): <https://ig.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/12/oig-doccs-racial-disparities-report-12.1.22.pdf> and [Freedom Delayed, Justice Denied](#) (2024).

*“Young Black men aged 20 to 24 face an incarceration rate 8 times greater than for white men of the same age, while Latinx men in that age group face an incarceration rate 3 times higher than their white counterparts.<sup>22</sup> While racial disparity permeates the criminal legal system, it is more pronounced for emerging adults than any other age group in the adult system. One factor driving the disparity is that emerging adults are disproportionately criminalized. In New York young people aged 18 to 25 make up approximately 10% of the population but over 20% of arrests statewide.<sup>23</sup>”*

- Being a Corrections Officer, like being a police officer or fire fighter, requires training, life experience, and maturity. To start a career as a firefighter in NYS you must be at least 21, to become a police officer the age varies between 20 and 21. It is unfair to 18 year olds- whose brains are still developing and who by virtue of their age, have little professional and limited life experience- to make this job (which includes having power and responsibility over others' lives) available to them.
- While people can be enlisted at age 18, this is an outdated age. The Selective Service Act of 1917 conscripted men from age 21 to 31 into the US military. This was updated in 1940, but still had the minimum age at 21.<sup>24</sup> In 1941, during World War II, the age was lowered to 18 and extended to age 65. We now know that brains are still developing until age 25 and today, *“Studies [on emerging adulthood] find that this period is longer now than in previous generations: emerging adults today stay in school longer, rely more on their parents for financial support, and wait longer to marry and have children.”<sup>25</sup>*

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, citing E. Ann Carson, Prisoners in 2019 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020), <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/p19.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Youth Represent and Children's Defense Fund of NY, [Expanding Youth Justice In New York](#) (2020).

<sup>24</sup> As per Wikipedia: “President Roosevelt's signing of the Selective Training and Service Act on September 16, 1940, began the first peacetime draft in the United States. The 1940 law instituted conscription in peacetime, requiring the registration of all men between 21 and 35.”

<sup>25</sup> Richard J. Bonnie, et. al., eds. [Investing in the Health and Well-Being of Young Adults](#). Washington, DC: National Academies Press (2015).

## **Addendum: Osborne's 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.

### **Marcus Garvey Supportive Housing Program: permanent housing**

The Marcus Garvey Supportive Housing Program consists of 52 studio and one bedroom apartments designated for those over 50 returning from lengthy terms of incarceration (residents have served an average of 25 years of incarceration). This vibrant and welcoming community has brought relief to its residents in their quest to find a safe, supportive home and a place that recognizes their needs. This is especially meaningful for those who are transitioning after decades of inadequate and unaddressed health needs and a lack of digital and technological skills.

### **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.