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DISABILITY SERVICES PROVIDERS CALL FOR JUSTICE CENTER “RESET”

Cohoes, NY – Provider groups representing more than 250 not-for-profit agencies supporting New Yorkers with disabilities have issued a report calling for a review and refocusing of the New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs (“Justice Center”). The report, **“The Justice Center: Opportunity Missed,”** is based on responses to a survey from 119 organizations across the state that provide supports and services for people with disabilities.

The report asks for a thoughtful examination and evaluation of the Justice Center with an eye on its impact on the human services provider community. The not-for-profit organizations seek broad fundamental changes in the Justice Center’s mission and functions with a focus on quality assurance activities, development of best practices, and education. The report is intended to prompt a collaborative discussion to this end, and seize the opportunities missed by the Justice Center’s processes to date.

“Our field widely supported the goals of the Legislature and Governor Cuomo to increase efficiency in the handling of allegations of abuse and neglect,” but it is time for the State to look closely at the impact of the Justice Center on the people we support and the employees who are there day in and day out supporting them,” said Rhonda Frederick, President, Developmental Disabilities Alliance of Western New York (DDAWNY).

While the findings do indicate that improvements in the Justice Center’s operations have been noted since it began operations in 2013, those improvements don’t address the central question of whether the Justice Center is focused on the appropriate goals. The report calls on the New York State Legislature to seek a NYS Comptroller’s audit of the Justice Center to make recommendations on improving its efficiency as well as to revise the authorizing legislation to refocus the agency on quality improvement and education. With less than 5% of its investigations leading to criminal charges, the need for the Justice Center to be a law enforcement entity is questioned. The report recommends that the Justice Center be repositioned as a referral agent for law enforcement, and narrow its focus to systemic problems and the most egregious findings of abuse and neglect.

A central theme in the report is that a Governor’s report developed by Clarence Sundram held goals that providers and families supported, yet the authorizing statute and the implementation of the Justice Center has been a “missed opportunity” to streamline the administrative burden on providers while ensuring equal assurance of protections for our most vulnerable citizens across State agencies. In many instances,

the report points to facts suggesting that the Justice Center's impact has been diametrically opposed to its stated goals, pointing out the negative impact on the people the agencies support and the employees who work for them.

Survey responses indicate there has been little improvement in protections or quality of life for people with disabilities and significant costs have been added. Organizations providing services further indicated that actions and statements of Justice Center Investigators have negatively impacted staff morale and added to the already difficult task of recruiting and retaining quality employees.

"We hope that this report's findings will prompt real change and restore good judgment and common sense related to the severity of conduct. In short, it's time to hit the 'reset' button on the Justice Center," said Susan Constantino, President & CEO of Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State (CP of NYS).

"If New York State acts quickly to restructure the Justice Center, there is an opportunity to refocus the agency on the most critical elements of its mission of ensuring the safety of vulnerable people; supporting and protecting the rights of the employees working with them; and streamlining administrative processes across state agencies," said Seth Stein, Executive Director & General Counsel, Alliance of Long Island Agencies, Inc. (The Alliance).

The report concludes: "Without significant revisions to the statute, the New York State Justice Center legacy is likely to be one diametrically opposed to its stated goals – rather than support and protect, the current projection of the Justice Center may well be to cause irrevocable harm to the very people it is intended to protect."

[Link to Report](#)

[Link to Executive Summary and Recommendations](#)

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