



New York State Defenders Association, Inc.

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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT **A66 (Hevesi) / S550 (Brisport)**

The New York State Defenders Association (NYSDA) writes in strong support of the Anti-Harassment in Reporting bill, A66-A/S550.

NYSDA, through our Public Defense Backup Center and Veterans Defense Program, provides comprehensive services to the approximately 6,000 public defenders, legal aid society lawyers, and court-appointed attorneys in over 130 county-based programs who represent people accused of crime and adults involved in family court cases who cannot afford to hire an attorney. We offer training, legal research, a statewide clearinghouse, and substantial technical and legal assistance that is critical to the effectiveness of overburdened defenders, and vital for improving racial and social justice.

Each year, anonymous reports to the State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment disrupt thousands of New York families with unnecessary, invasive investigations that are ultimately determined to be baseless. These investigations are extremely stressful to parents and harmful to children. They waste resources that are better directed to support children and families.

The harms of false reporting fall disproportionately on low-income, Black, and brown New Yorkers. As the New York State Bar Association concluded in a report on racial justice in 2022, it is an “urgent imperative to end the unnecessary disruption and destruction of Black families caused by the child welfare system.”¹ As a concrete step in that direction, the Bar Association specifically called on legislators to prohibit anonymous reports to the State Central Register.²

The current law hurts domestic violence survivors in particular, by allowing their abusers to continue to harass them and their children by taking advantage of the weaknesses of the reporting system.

The Anti-Harassment in Reporting bill offers a simple solution that will substantially cut down on malicious false reporting by requiring callers who make allegations of child abuse and neglect to provide their names and contact information. The law provides strict confidentiality to those who make reports and will deter some of those who would otherwise make false reports, while allowing child protective services to better assess allegations.

For these reasons, the New York State Defenders Association strongly supports passage of A66-A/S550.

Contact Susan C. Bryant, 518-465-3524 x 26, sbryant@nysda.org (1/21/2025)

¹ New York State Bar Association Committee on Families and the Law, *Report and Recommendations on Racial Justice and Child Welfare* (March 2022), available at <https://nysba.org/app/uploads/2022/03/Committee-on-Families-and-the-Law-report-and-all-comments.pdf>.

² *Id.* at 28.

