



**BROOKLYN
DEFENDER
SERVICES**

Testimony of D.R., Client Incarcerated at OBCC

**Delivered Before:
New York City Board of Correction**

Hearing Regarding Proposed Changes to Minimum Standards

October 16, 2015

I receive visits every week from my mother. Visits are important because when you actually see a loved one, or a friend comes to see you it provides a feeling of home, even though you are in this secluded place. When you are in jail you are forced to find people in the jail who share your feelings and views to serve as some kind of family. So when someone on the outside comes to visit you, you know there is actually someone in the outside world who is thinking about you, and that your world is still there for you when you get out. In my opinion, a phone call is not as impactful as a visit, not as physical.

The first time I got a visit from my mom and sister and aunt, I was able to hug them, and my mom held me. If you take that away, you just feel like an animal in a cage. Some people make mistakes and not everyone is a criminal. If you take away visits you take away a hope for freedom.

Having visits also lets our families feel connected to us; it is as much for them as it is for us. When I say family, I mean family in the way we all experience family – the people we consider family are not always related to us by blood. One of my best friends since I was young has been my “brother” since we were about 12 years old. It’s common sense that people like these become family.

It comes down to people abusing their power – my experience is that when people in the jail have power, they do abuse it. Staff take advantage of people’s insecurities, it makes some people a lot worse when they leave here than when they came.

If there was a barrier at the visit table it will take away any sense of comfort and closeness. A barrier enforces the fact that I’m in here, away from them. I worry about my mom feeling that her baby really has been taken away from her. They are punishing the visitors as much as they are punishing us. The people who come to see you go through so much to see you – taking off their shoes, taking off their bra, showing their underwear, changing their hair. If they go through all that, they want the visit to be worth it – to be close to you.

Being held by my mom reminds me that I’m not alone in here, that there’s someone out there. A hug can speak in many ways. Being close throughout a visit means a lot. I can smell my mom, I love the way she smells; it makes me feel safe. The first time I saw my mom she was able to wipe the tears away from my face. When I went back to the unit I was happy. That touch can last for weeks.



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