



February 11, 2020

Margaret Egan, Executive Director
NYC Board of Correction
1 Centre Street, Room 2213
New York, NY 10007

RE: Limited Six-Month Variance Request to the Board of Correction Minimum Standards Regarding the Department of Correction's Use of Separation Status Housing

Dear Executive Director Egan,

Together, New York City libraries have provided televisiting access to New Yorkers for four years. Beginning in 2014, Brooklyn Public Library has operated TeleStory, a free program that connects individuals in custody of the New York City Department of Correction (DOC) and other City agencies to their loved ones through the use of teleconferencing equipment at libraries. In 2016, with the support of the New York City Council, and subsequently the Mayor, TeleStory expanded into The New York Public Library (NYPL) and Queens Public Library systems. The program is now available in 23 public libraries across all five boroughs, including 12 in Brooklyn, three in Queens and eight branches in the NYPL system. Visits are available, by appointment, from 3pm until library closing Monday through Friday. Collectively, the libraries have conducted over 5,000 visits since the service began.

TeleStory sessions allow families to connect in a safe, welcoming and supportive environment. By design, TeleStory supplements in-person visits. Our goal in developing TeleStory was to offer more opportunities for families and others to remain connected to incarcerated individuals and build a stronger system of support post-incarceration. We understand that the DOC has proposed a Variance Request to the Board of Correction (BOC) that library-based televisiting be used as a direct replacement for in-person visitation for individuals held in Separation Status. While we have agreed to provide video visitation for individuals in Separation Status, it is a serious cause of concern for our three library systems.

Our guiding principles for TeleStory are to ensure the program is easily accessible for families, it is free, and it complements and does not replace in-person visitation. The proposed Variance Request would compromise the last of these principles and would potentially set a precedent for the replacement of in-person visitation in other circumstances. A precedent we do not support. In addition, the library

systems were not consulted by the DOC prior to the Variance Request proposing this new use of video visitation.

When the three New York City public library systems negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the DOC to govern the operation of TeleStory, we shared our guiding principles for the program, and were explicit that library-based televisiting is not a replacement for in-person visits. The MOU clearly identifies televisiting as a program and not as a form of visiting. This means that the library systems' televisiting service is not covered by BOC Minimum Standards. In order to protect the rights of incarcerated people and their families, and to uphold our guiding principles for the program, we request that the BOC set minimum standards for the use of televisiting.

We appreciate your consideration and would be happy to discuss this issue at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Nicholas Higgins
Chief Librarian
Brooklyn Public Library



Brian Bannon
Merryl and James Tisch Director
The New York Public Library



Nick Buron
Chief Librarian
Queens Public Library