

**Administration:**

1001 E. Delavan Ave, Buffalo, NY 14215
(716) 856-6131

www.PeaceprintsWNY.org

January 3, 2024

Legislator Howard Johnson, Jr.
Erie County District 1 Representative
Chair of the Erie County Public Safety Committee
1367 Fillmore Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14211

Re: Access East Ferry Detention Center

Legislator Johnson,

Peaceprints of WNY is a Buffalo-based non-profit helping individuals returning to the community from incarceration. Although we have been providing reentry services to Erie County for nearly four decades, we have grown tremendously since 2018, when we were awarded Erie County's first Federal Second Chance Act Grant. The \$1M award enabled us to pilot out "Project Blue", a collaboration between the Erie County Sheriff's Office and Peaceprints of WNY to provide intensive, individualized case management to individuals while they are incarcerated and continuing for one-year post-release.

I am proud to report that in the five years since we first launched Project Blue, we have expanded from serving 100 medium-to-high risk Project Blue clients a year to over 700 individuals across both county jails in 2023. Despite this tremendous growth, our recidivism rate has consistently remained below 10% year after year. When compared to the 2018 county recidivism rate of 81%, our results are outstanding and due in no small part to the transparency, partnership, and accountability Peaceprints holds ourselves and our partners to.

These unprecedented results have since warranted three additional federal investments to Peaceprints, including a \$750,000 grant awarded on September 27, 2022, by the Office of Justice Programs and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The award will be dispersed over three years to pilot a program for justice-involved youth that is modeled after the successful takeaways from Project Blue. Primary among these takeaways is the importance of an open and transparent partnership between Peaceprints and the Erie County Youth Services Center. Physical access to the Youth Detention Center as well as communication, data, assessments, classification, criminal records, and court records are a critical component to ensuring the best possible outcomes for clients and accurate program evaluation.



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An MOU signed on May 31, 2022, by then Deputy Commissioner of Youth Services of Erie County, Paul Kubala, was submitted to OJJDP as part of our application to pilot Empower Youth at the East Ferry Youth Detention Center and duplicate the success of Project Blue in the realm of youth justice.

Project Blue is currently being studied by the US Bureau of Justice Assistance for duplication as a potential national best practice. Empower Youth holds the same potential – both for our justice-involved young people, and for everyone who comes after them. It has the potential to connect young people to resources and support during a critical point in their adolescent development and can make the difference in them avoiding future justice-involvement as an adult. It offers another chance for Erie County to become a national leader in this space without requiring any financial investment from our county.

Unfortunately, with only three years to pilot out the program (during which time a third-party evaluator will study the program), time is a limited resource and currently, we are unable to access the facility. Without access to the facility, Peaceprints is unable to offer pre-release services, which we believe weakens the impact of our programming and harms the outcomes for the young justice-involved people we had hoped to serve.

Therefore, I humbly ask for direction from the Public Safety Committee on how to best proceed. I have enclosed a copy of our signed MOU and the project narrative as it was awarded. Should you have any additional questions or if the opportunity to provide more information presents itself, please do not hesitate to reach out.

With appreciation,

Cindi McEachon
CEO
Peaceprints of WNY

CC:

Kenneth Simmons, Deputy Commissioner for Youth Services
Mark Poloncarz, Erie County Executive
Lisa Chimera, Deputy County Executive
Marie Cannon, Commissioner Department of Social Services