

March 20, 2025

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie, Chair Myrie, and Chair Dinowitz,

As religious leaders committed to justice, fairness, and the well-being of all New Yorkers, we are writing in support of Governor Hochul's proposal to tweak discovery laws in New York State.

We believe that the Governor's proposed changes are essential to ensuring fairness for all parties involved — victims, defendants, and the public at large. While New York's 2019 discovery reform introduced critical improvements to our justice system, with a few years of experience and data we are now seeing some unintended consequences of those reforms, namely a significant increase in cases being dismissed due to technicalities unrelated to the merits of the case. This means that victims in our communities are not seeing justice, and we write out of concern for them.

In addition to our concern for victims in our communities, as religious leaders we are deeply committed to the principles of redemption and second chances and believe in diversion programs, alternatives to incarceration, and programs like problem-solving courts that work to address the underlying issues that bring people into the criminal justice system. Because currently defendants know their case will likely get dismissed, there is less incentive to participate in these rehabilitation programs. We are disappointed by this, as we believe that these programs reduce recidivism and help people get their lives back on track.

We want to be clear: the Governor's proposal is not a rollback of the 2019 reforms, and we would never support it if it was. We believe strongly in the rights of defendants. But we also represent victims, and we know that someone can be a defendant one day and a victim the next. We see first-hand the impact of cases being dismissed on technicalities and victims not getting justice, and that is why we are supporting the Governor's proposed adjustments to the law, which we believe will improve justice for victims without undermining the rights of defendants.

As faith leaders, we believe in justice, mercy, and accountability, and we believe that the Governor's proposal will bring about a more just criminal justice system and increase public safety.

Thank you,

Rev. A.R. Bernard, *Christian Cultural Center & NYS Interfaith Executive Council President*

Imam Ahmed Ali, *Iqra Masjid Brooklyn*

Rev. Al Cockfield, *God's Battalion of Prayer*

Rev. Al Sharpton, *National Action Network*

Pastor Alejandro Lopez, *EKKLESIA Long Island Ministries*

Pastor Carl Washington, Jr., *New Mount. Zion Baptist Church & NYS Interfaith Executive Council Member*

Carloynn Sozen, *Executive Board Member of ISNF- Islamic Society of Northern Frontier & NYS Interfaith Executive Council Member*

Pastor Carolyn Rayside, *Tabernacle of Praise*

Bishop Colette Matthews-Carter, *NYS Interfaith Council County Liaison*

Rabbi Deborah Bravo, *Makom NY & NYS Interfaith Executive Council Member*

Pastor Demetrius Carolina, *First Central Baptist Church*

Rev. Doyeon Park, *Won Buddhism UN/Interfaith<sup>[SEP]</sup>President, Buddhist Council of New York & NYS Interfaith Executive Council Member*

Bishop Fernando Rodriguez, *Latin African-American Chaplain Association*

Bishop Dr. H. Bernard Alex, *Ministries of Victory Temple/Ministries Outside The Walls - Executive Director & Town Board Council*

Guruji H.H. Dileepkumar Thankappan, *Global Chairman, CEO & Guru of the World Yoga Community Main NGO & NYS Interfaith Executive Council Member*

Associate Minister Hermina Waithe, *St. John AME Church*

Fr. Isaac Sorial, *Virgin Mary & St. George Orthodox Church*

Pastor Jack Klosheim, *Community Bible Chapel*

Pastor John Carter, *Abundant Life Christian Church & NYS Interfaith Executive Council Member*

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, *Astoria Center of Israel*

Rev. Dr. Kia Brooks, *Nazareth University & NYS Interfaith Executive Council Member*

Rev. Lal Singh, *Lay Pastor*

Pastor Louis Straker, Jr., *Reflections Church*

Imam Maaz Ali, *Iqra Masjid*

Imam Mansoor Rafiq Umar, *Halal Watch World, LLC & NYS Interfaith Executive Council Member*

Pastor Maria Rivera, *C3 Clergy 105 PCT*

Minister Michael Rosendary, *GodSquad*

Imam Muhammad Shahidullah, *Dawah USA*

Bishop Orland Findlayter, *New Hope Christian Fellowship*

Minister Patricia Price, *Tabernacle of Praise Cathedral*

Rev. Patrick Bufford, *Centennial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*

Rabbi Peter Stein, *Temple B'rith Kodesh*

Pastor Philip Falayi, *Hosanna City of Refuge Church*

Bishop Raymond Rivera, *Latino Pastoral Action Center, Council of Holistic Christian Churches and Ministries, & NYS Interfaith Executive Council Member*

Rev. Dr. Robert Waterman, *Antioch Baptist Church*

Rabbi Shlomo Nisanov, *Kehilat Sephardim Of Ahavat Achim*

CC: Governor Kathy Hochul