

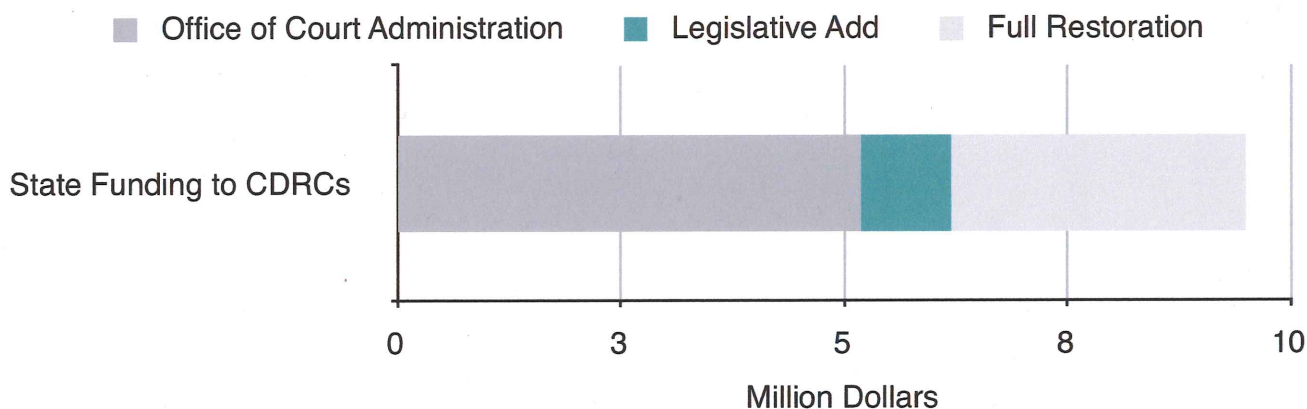


## Community Dispute Resolution Centers FY 2015-16 Budget Request

### The Request

New York State's Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs) are independent not-for-profits providing free or low-cost mediation, facilitation, conciliation, and arbitration services to New Yorkers, giving people the tools they need to address conflicts in their lives peacefully. The CDRCs were established in 1981 by Article 21A of the New York State Judiciary Law to meet needs for access to justice and as an alternative to structured judicial settings. The New York State Dispute Resolution Association is a professional association, with the CDRCs among its members. NYSDRA also administers several mediation and arbitration programs for state and federal agencies.

The CDRCs are requesting a \$1 million legislative add in FY 2015-16 as a partial restoration of funding to stabilize the CDRC network. As demonstrated in the chart below, the CDRCs currently receive \$5.2 million in funding from the New York State Office of Court Administration (OCA); a similar amount is expected in FY 2015-16. That is considerably less than the \$9.5 million that would represent full funding.

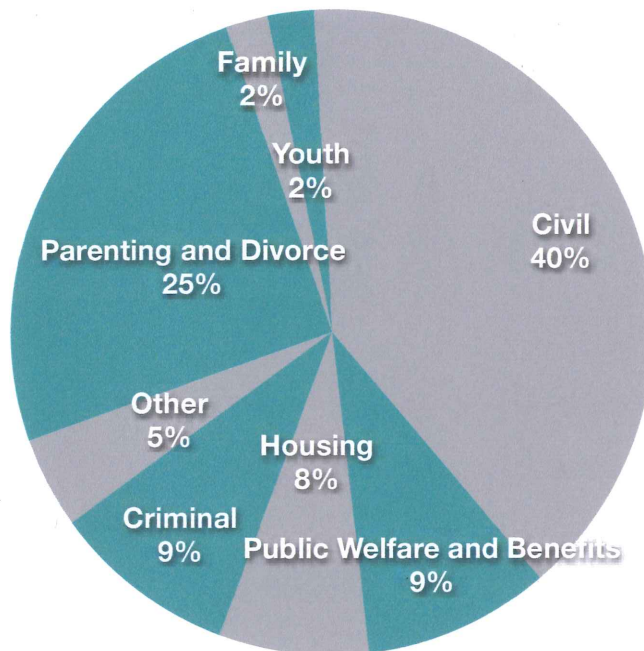


### Background

State funding for the CDRC programs was decreased by 44% in FY 2009-10. The funding reduction was due to the economic crisis and was one result of the \$170 million cut to New York's Judiciary in FY 2011-12. Over the last few years, other OCA programs received annual cost of living adjustments, while the CDRCs received just a slight 1% increase last year. The network continues to work with OCA to increase its funding, but given OCA's budget constraints and the many ways in which the CDRC services benefit communities beyond the courts, the CDRCs are asking the Legislature to help diversify their base of support.

After the cuts, the CDRCs streamlined their staff and programs while continuing to provide responsive and accessible services to New Yorkers in all 62 counties. As the chart to the right shows, CDRC services are used to address custody, visitation, divorce, public welfare, housing, youth, civil, and criminal matters. The programs are now at a crisis point and need a restoration of funding. Demand for their work continues to grow and the cost of providing services continues to rise. Without an additional investment, the CDRCs will be forced to further reduce services, eliminate key staff and programs, and decline program expansion opportunities. The end result will be a weakened CDRC network and fewer opportunities for New Yorkers to seek help for the difficult conflicts in their lives.

**Disputes Mediated by CDRCs**



The CDRC network has always had a larger mandate to meet local community needs around conflict resolution and as such has a defined role outside the court system. In the past, CDRCs were successful in leveraging OCA-funded programs and established local partnerships to provide additional services needed in their communities including innovative services for veterans, aging adults and their caregivers, young people, schools, families, and people leaving the corrections system. Many of these programs have been eliminated or restricted, which has resulted in a loss of important community resources for vulnerable populations.

### **The Funds**

The legislative add will allow the CDRCs to restore some of the eliminated services and better respond to the needs of their communities. The \$1 million would be spread across the 21 CDRCs in all 62 counties. Each CDRC would customize its spending in accordance with local needs, with at least 80% of the funds expected to be spent on program salaries. Those salaries would fund the positions of staff providing direct services and outreach to community members most in need of access to mediation and conflict resolution.

*A legislative add will supplement the foundation the CDRCs and OCA have built, allowing programs to return to the diverse array of services once offered. Constituents will directly benefit from services, important business and personal relationships will be preserved, and communities will be safer and more productive.*

**Conflict resolution is cost effective, yet provides high-quality service.** Conflict resolution is not a short cut - it is a professional service that provides individuals, families, and groups with an alternative to public intervention.

**Mediation saves the State money and resources.** From start to finish, the average mediation costs just \$333, which is far less than the cost borne by the courts for even the most minor criminal or civil matter. CDRCs have longstanding partnerships with their local courts, schools, law enforcement, businesses, and community institutions, all of whom refer cases and reap the benefit of a strong CDRC network.

**Sixty-nine percent of CDRC cases are mediated by volunteers.** CDRCs have dedicated professional staff members who work with panels of trained and experienced neutrals from their local communities. Volunteers receive initial training from mediation trainers certified by OCA, complete supervised apprenticeships, and participate in continuing education. There are well over 1,000 community members currently serving as CDRC volunteer mediators.

**Mediation produces high-quality results.** In FY 2013-14, the CDRCs served a total of 70,602 individuals and screened 28,792 cases, resulting in 15,394 mediations and other dispute resolution processes. CDRC services are designed to be responsive to individual needs and give people the means to work through their conflicts constructively, creating their own solutions. There is a high level of compliance with mediated agreements, and a recent study of CDRC case outcomes showed that participants were highly satisfied with the mediation process, with over 92% of participants saying the process was fair.

**CDRCs offer a strong return on investment.** CDRCs are more than quadrupling the value of every dollar in public funds they receive. For every \$1 of public funding, the CDRCs bring in a \$1 match in dollars and a \$3 match in volunteer hours.

**The CDRC network has a well-defined role outside the court system.** While 57% of CDRCs' 28,792 cases in FY 2013-14 were referred by the courts, the rest of their caseload came from other places in their communities. Over 20% of cases were referred by public agencies and schools, and 14% of cases were self-referred - situations where people sought help on their own before their conflicts rose to the level of public intervention. In addition, the CDRCs provide training and education in schools, workplaces, and other community settings to help people manage conflict in their personal and professional lives.

**For more information contact:**

Charlotte Carter  
Executive Director  
New York State Dispute Resolution Association  
518-687-2240 (ext. 12)  
charlotte@NYSDRA.org

*NYSDRA is a not-for-profit membership organization committed to the promotion of quality conflict management and peaceful dispute resolution.*