



July 28, 2016

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
NYS Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

**Re: Support for S6859 (Avella)/A9759 (Buchwald)**

Dear Governor Cuomo:

**As the Executive Director of Brooklyn Defender Services (“BDS”), I write to respectfully urge you to sign S6859 (Avella)/A9759 (Buchwald) into law. This bill simply incorporates into the Family Court Act existing practice which assumes that siblings in child protective, permanency and termination of parental rights proceedings should be together. Previously this preference was only codified in a 2015 Office of Children and Family Services Administrative Memo.**

BDS is a comprehensive indigent legal service organization that provides multi-disciplinary and client-centered criminal defense, family defense, immigration and civil legal services, and social work support to more than 40,000 indigent Brooklyn residents every year.

Two-thirds of children in the foster care system have siblings in care. For youth already suffering the trauma of separation from their homes, maintenance of their relationships with their siblings may be a vital lifeline, a protective shield against further trauma, an aid in coping with loss and grief, and essential to development of normal attachments and self-esteem - significantly, often the most stable and consistent relationship available.

While the guidelines from the Administrative Memo are already practice here in Brooklyn, we hope that this change in the law will ensure that all family courts across the state prioritize and support sibling relationships. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Family Defense Practice Director Lauren Shapiro at [lshapiro@bds.org](mailto:lshapiro@bds.org) or (347) 592-2510.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lisa Schreibersdorf'.

Lisa Schreibersdorf  
Executive Director  
Brooklyn Defender Services