STATE OF NEW YORK

11413

IN ASSEMBLY

May 15, 2026

Introduced by COMMITTEE ON RULES -- (at request of M. of A. Zinerman) -- read once and referred to the Committee on Correction

AN ACT to amend the correction law, in relation to enacting the "family reunification and economic empowerment act"

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Short title. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "family reunification and economic empowerment act".

§ 2. Legislative findings and intent. The legislature finds and declares that:

Family separation caused by incarceration has devastating social and economic consequences for children and communities across New York state. Existing prison labor systems rely on compulsory, underpaid, and non-rehabilitative work, which prevents incarcerated individuals from meaningfully contributing to the well-being of their families or preparing for successful reentry. Strengthening family bonds during incarceration reduces recidivism, improves child outcomes, and lowers state spending on foster care, child welfare, and public assistance. A rehabilitative employment and training model that pays fair wages to incarcerated individuals, invests in family connections, and builds marketable skills will create a path toward family stability, economic empowerment, and community safety. The state further finds that its purchasing power should be used to strengthen families and communities, not perpetuate cycles of poverty and incarceration.

It is the intent of this act to:

1. Prevent unnecessary family separation by providing technology and support for ongoing contact between incarcerated parents and their children;

2. Create a pilot program in New York City that establishes paid apprenticeships for incarcerated parents;

3. Ensure that compensation earned can be used to support dependents, cover commissary needs, and build financial readiness for reentry;

EXPLANATION--Matter in *italics* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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4. By reforming procurement practices and opening opportunities to incarcerated workers, New York can align its economic policies with the values of rehabilitation, family stability, and community reinvestment.

§ 3. The correction law is amended by adding a new section 173 to read as follows:

§ 173. Family reunification and economic empowerment pilot program. 1. Establishment. There is hereby created a family reunification and economic empowerment pilot program or "pilot program", administered by the department, to provide incarcerated parents in the city of New York with access to paid apprenticeship and employment opportunities while incarcerated.

2. Wages. Participants in such pilot program shall be compensated at a rate no less than fifty percent of the state minimum wage.

3. Use of earnings. Earnings from apprenticeship and employment opportunities pursuant to such pilot program shall be deposited into accounts designated for the incarcerated individual and may be allocated toward:

(a) child support or dependent care payments;

(b) commissary purchases; and

(c) savings accounts for reentry upon release.

4. Training and certification. Participants shall receive access to vocational training and workforce development programs aligned with high-demand industries, with certification opportunities recognized by state and private sector employers as referenced in paragraph two of subdivision a of section thirty-five hundred two of the New York city charter.

5. Virtual family contact for incarcerated parents. The department shall establish and maintain a program to ensure that incarcerated parents have regular opportunities for virtual contact with their minor children, such children's guardians or caregivers, and other family members, where appropriate. The department shall install, maintain, and make accessible audiovisual meeting equipment in correctional facilities for the purpose of facilitating such contact. The department may partner with community-based organizations, libraries, child welfare organizations, and family support programs, including programs similar to Children of Promise and the Brooklyn Public Library, to support meaningful engagement between incarcerated parents and their children.

6. Evaluation. Such pilot program shall be independently evaluated within two years of the effective date of this section, with findings reported to the governor, the legislature, and the public on the impact of such pilot program on family stability, reentry success, and state expenditures.

§ 4. Severability clause. If any clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section or part of this act shall be adjudged by any court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, such judgment shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remainder thereof, but shall be confined in its operation to the clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section or part thereof directly involved in the controversy in which such judgment shall have been rendered. It is hereby declared to be the intent of the legislature that this act would have been enacted even if such invalid provisions had not been included herein.

§ 5. This act shall take effect immediately.