

Rise

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The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NY State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

RE: The Preserving Family Bonds Act, S.6357(Savino)/A.6700(Joyner)

October 13, 2021

Greetings Governor Hochul:

We are writing in support of the Preserving Family Bonds Bill S.6357/A.6700, which would grant Family Court Judges the discretion to order contact between children and their parents after the termination of parental rights (TPR) if it serves in the best interests of the children. We are delighted the Senate and Assembly have passed this significant legislation, and we ask that you sign it into law.

Led by parents impacted by the child welfare system—also known as the family policing system, Rise believes that parents have the answers for their families and communities. Our organization has worked with more than 350 parents nationwide to write about their experiences with the child welfare system. Often, the parents who contribute to Rise were also separated from their own families as children. Intergenerational trauma is a prominent issue and parents deeply understand the trauma caused by family separation and the desire to connect to family members. S.6357/A.6700 acknowledges the value of post-termination contact for biological parents and children after TPR.

Currently, post-adoption visitation orders can only be made if a parent agrees to surrender their rights. As a result, parents are forced to make tough decisions. Moreover, when a parent's rights are terminated, visits can end abruptly without explanation to the child. These instances can contribute to an increased sense of trauma and abandonment for both parents and children. Even when foster care caseworkers recognize the value of maintaining a relationship between the child and biological parents, there is no legal process to facilitate contact with a court order.

Research supports openness in adoption, demonstrating the benefits to healthy child development of maintaining biological connections, but legal structures have placed barriers to these connections. Parents' and youths' stories illustrate the harm that is caused by the law cutting off familial relationships without considering that ongoing contact may be in children's best

interests. Please sign this bill to align New York law with research evidence and families' experiences by allowing post-adoption contact and preserving family bonds.

Thank you for your time and service,

Bianca Shaw, Co-Executive Director

Jeanette Vega, Co-Executive Director

Rise Staff