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Karen Schimke
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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT
S5395A (Hassell-Thompson) / A3686A (Aubry)
May 13, 2010

AN ACT to amend the public health law, in relation to establishing no fee shall be charged for certain requests for birth certificates.

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA) supports S5395A, legislation which allows no fee to be charged for obtaining a copy of one's birth certificate for those inmates and youth exiting correctional and juvenile justice facilities. The bill permits the Department of Corrections, local correctional facilities, the Office of Children and Family Services, or an authorized agency to request free copies of birth certificates in preparation for discharges from placement.

A birth certificate is needed to acquire a social security card, a driver's license, and other forms of identification. Without this identification, youth who exit state and local facilities will find it difficult to enter school, obtain working papers, and secure employment. This bill eliminates a significant barrier for successful reentry and for youth to become positive, contributing citizens in their communities. With a copy of a birth certificate in hand, a youth can more easily obtain working papers and a driver's license needed for gainful employment. Further, the state has an obligation to the youth in their custody and an interest in supporting their successful reentry to reduce recidivism rates and the costs associated with future placements.

Of significance is the omission of foster care youth in this bill. They, too, are in the care and custody of the state and have many barriers to success upon leaving foster care. We ask that you consider including foster care youth as a population for whom this fee is waived, either in this version of the bill, or in the future.

SCAA supports S5395A and urges the Senate to join with the Assembly in passing this legislation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Karen Schimke'.

Karen Schimke
President/CEO