

## Memorandum in Support

NYSBA #27

March 5, 2026

A. 9120

By: M. of A. Rajkumar  
Assembly Committee: Governmental Operations  
Effective Date: 180<sup>th</sup> Day after enactment

**AN ACT** to amend the executive law, in relation to providing free legal counsel to domestic violence survivors

**LAW AND SECTION REFERRED TO:** Executive Law is amended by adding a new section 577

The New York State Bar Association supports A.9120, which if enacted would provide for free legal counsel to domestic violence survivors in divorce proceedings. In 2018, NYSBA and the Women’s Bar Association of the State of New York (WBASNY) partnered to create a joint Domestic Violence Initiative and drafted a report and a list of recommendations with the aim of working toward addressing the scourge of domestic violence in New York.<sup>1</sup> The Initiative focused on domestic violence involving people in current or former intimate relationships.

The report discussed the reality that people who leave abusive relationships frequently have limited resources and many desperately need legal assistance in seeking orders of protection against their abusers and in dealing with legal issues such as housing, child custody, support and visitation, and divorce. High-quality civil legal assistance plays a vital role in protecting the health and well-being of victims and their children. Research has shown that access to legal services is one of the most effective interrupters of domestic violence, even more effective than access to shelters, hotlines, or counseling.<sup>2</sup> Legal services are the most expensive support services for domestic violence victims, and the services to which the fewest victims have access, yet they are essential to ending the cycle of violence and making a victim whole.

In 2018, the Domestic Violence Initiative noted the concerning access to justice gap when it came to domestic violence survivors obtaining legal assistance. The above legislation would create a new civil legal services program to provide for free legal counsel in divorce proceedings for those domestic violence survivors who are income eligible, meaning any individual who is a resident of the state of New York aged 18 or older, and whose annual gross household income is not in excess of two hundred fifty percent of the federal poverty guidelines as updated periodically in the Federal Register by the United States Department of Health and Human Services under the authority of 42 U.S.C. § 9902(2). This bill is an important step toward

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<sup>1</sup> *New York State Bar Association and Women’s Bar Association of the State of New York Domestic Violence Initiative Final Report*, January 26, 2018, [Binder1.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> Farmer & Teifenthaler, *Contemporary Economic Policy*, Volume 21, Issue 2, April 2003, (pgs 158–172)

empowering survivors and ensuring that they are not faced with staggering costs in the process of divorcing their abuser and embarking on their next chapter in life.

For the above reasons and the attached report, the New York State Bar Association **SUPPORTS** A.9120 and urges its passage.