

2023 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Mental Hygiene Written Testimony

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc, (ATI) (Cortland, NY) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony to the 2023 Mental Hygiene Joint Legislative Budget Hearing for FY 2024 budget decisions. After reviewing the information found in the Briefing Book (PDF) | NYS FY 2024 Executive Budget, we hope the hearing decision makers will take our comments and feedback into consideration.

First, under the “Supporting People with Developmental Disabilities and Their Families” section (p. 113), the book proposes to expand Intensive Treatment Opportunity (ITO) units with \$11.7 million in capital funding. While inpatient care is sometimes necessary, it is not the most integrative setting. More ITO units should only be built if there is no alternative to meeting people’s needs with self-direction and integrated community-based programs. Establishing a statewide ombudsman program, developing more accessible housing, and providing flexibility for delegated nursing tasks are laudable goals so long as proper considerations to meet the highest needs are safely prioritized.

Second, under the “Promoting Mental Health” section (p. 114), the book proposes to expand inpatient bed capacity by 1,000 beds, including 150 new State-operated beds. As stated above, in-patient care is not the most integrative setting. New York must not revert to relying on institutionalization to address the ongoing care these individuals need in order to thrive. Instead, this funding should be invested in expanding successful community-based residential programs, strengthening suicide prevention and emotional supports, and recruiting and retaining additional community-based mental health care providers and expanding access to telehealth counseling.

Third, under the “Multi-Agency Budget Actions” section (p. 117), the book contains a proposal to include a 2.5% Cost of Living Adjustment to several service organizations and increasing funding to raise the minimum wage many of these employees earn. While this is vital to ensuring adequate staffing and retention levels, these raises must extend to all direct care workers and service providers to ensure freedom of choice for service beneficiaries. This initiative could be greatly improved by including the Fair Pay for Home Care Act in the budget plan. This would help meet the need for direct support services and decrease the need for institutional placements for individuals.

In conclusion, ATI supports the investment in critical community-based services and encourages the mental hygiene hearing committee to be critical of the use of in-patient and restrictive setting services. We urge the meaningful inclusion of individuals who receive services from these organizations at every stage of these proposals to ensure you are meeting the most pressing needs of these populations. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback, and for continuing to work toward a future where individuals have the services, supports, and opportunities to live in the most integrated setting possible and lead full and productive lives.