



## Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

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Testimony to Joint Legislative Public Hearing on  
2018-2019 Executive Budget Proposal Topic Mental Hygiene

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### **HEALTHY MINDS FOR A HEALTHY NEW YORK**

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Thank you very much for this opportunity, with a special thanks to our Mental Hygiene Committee Chairs, Assemblymember Gunther and Senator Ortt, who have been wonderful advocates for our cause as have all the committee members.

My name is Glenn Liebman and I am the CEO of the Mental Health Association in New York State. We are comprised of 26 affiliates in 52 counties throughout New York State. Most of our members provide community-based mental health services but all our members work in their community providing education, support and advocacy.

Our mission is to serve the greater good of the entire community. Much of our advocacy is geared to anti-stigma and educational efforts regarding mental health related issues. Just yesterday, through the leadership of our chairs, we held a press conference introducing the new Mental Health Public Awareness License Plates. These licenses are the first of their kind in the entire country.

The previous year through your leadership we were able to get the historic Mental Health Education in Schools bill passed which we will shortly discuss and the year before that, we had legislation passed creating a Mental Health Public Awareness Tax Checkoff in the NYS Income Tax. All of these pieces were landmark legislation in fighting mental health stigma and would not have happened without your leadership.

This is the 16<sup>th</sup> year I have had the opportunity to testify and there is much that has improved in our community, but unfortunately even with all that is better, there is still great concern about our existing system of care. Individuals with mental health concerns deal with long waiting lists, limited staff and outdated treatment plans resulting in diminished care; family members are stressed by inadequate services and providers are tremendously underfunded and cannot provide the staffing and the entire array of services that they would like to ensure greater choice for those most in need of services.

The 2019 proposed budget for mental health has no proposed cuts and most significantly the State commitment's to funding of the workforce increase remains in place as does the commitment to reinvestment of services. These commitments are essential to the continuation of the workforce and community supports. We are appreciative of Governor Cuomo in that the Executive Budget does continue these commitments.

That said, status quo does not mean complacency. We are the safety net for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers and we need more targeted funding to support community mental health services and the new mental health in school initiative.

We have several recommendations listed below that will help provide more needed services for individuals in the mental health system as well as raise awareness about mental health for the entire community.

## **Workforce**

Through all of your leadership last year, the mental hygiene workforce received greater funding and support than we have had in over a decade.

Providing a three and a quarter percent increase for much of our community staff on January 1<sup>st</sup> and April 1<sup>st</sup> responds to the need for a living wage for many of the hardest working people in New York State.

As both a family member and as someone who runs a mental health agency, I can say that there are no jobs more important in our daily lives than those people who work directly with some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

Your commitment and that of Governor Cuomo are greatly appreciated and are a strong step in the living wage fight. That said, it is a significant step, but it **is one step in a staircase of need**.

This year we want to keep the momentum alive for all of those individuals we serve and work with every day.

### *Recommendation:*

- MHANYS is part of a coalition of eleven other statewide behavioral health organizations (representing over 500,000 New Yorkers with behavioral health needs) calling for an increase of three and a quarter percent in funding reflected in January of 2019. The funding request is for \$11.8 million dollars and encompasses the same percentage increase as was provided last year.
- In addition, we are urging support for language that would include regularly scheduled increases for this workforce in April and January in future years much as the legislative intent was for this year.
- We are very supportive of other ideas regarding workforce whether through credentialing, tuition reimbursement, career ladders and other ideas that will ensure the recruitment and retention of quality staffs. We were pleased that ideas were referenced in the State of the State and we look forward to working with the Executive and the Legislature in insuring a productive and well trained workforce.

## **Mental Health Education in Schools**

Through your leadership and that of Governor Cuomo, New York became the first State in the nation to provide mandatory mental health education in schools. There has been a dramatic increase in the need for mental health in schools and the ability to teach about mental health at a younger age will help provide young people with the ability to have a greater understanding of mental health and to seek support when necessary. Not only has this been validated by those of us in the mental health community but many of the major statewide educational associations recognize the importance of mental health in schools.

This legislation is being operationalized on July 1 of this year. We have worked closely with our partners at the State Education Department, with special thanks to the commitment of Commissioner Elia and her leadership, on this issue. Through our combined efforts, we have put together a mental health advisory panel to the Commissioner.

We would also like to thank Commissioner Sullivan for her support, guidance and commitment to this issue.

Education and mental health experts from across the State have come together to help draft guidance materials for schools.

This is a massive undertaking that involves all parts of the education and mental health systems. As the lead agency that fought for this change, MHANYS is receiving many requests for clarification on what should be taught; how it should be taught; what are the role of teachers, counselors, and parents; and an array of other questions related to the new law.

Through our Statewide membership and our in house experts, we are able to help respond to these calls, but the reality is that the numbers are expanding much more than we have capacity to fill.

Though we believe that this legislation will change the course of the future of teaching about mental health in schools, the reality is that there is no funding associated with this new law.

This will be a seismic shift in the way that mental health is discussed and taught in schools. New York is leading the way in this change but we don't want to look back years from now and say how could we not have provided necessary funding for this sea change?

*Recommendation:*

- MHANYS is asking for the Legislature's support in funding for one million dollars to be able to create a School Mental Health Education Resource Center.
- This Center would provide phone and web based information to educators and families; referral services; additional updates and resources for interested parties; regularly scheduled regional summits; webinars; in person professional development as well as CTLE credits.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

**Housing**

Over the past twenty five years, the five residential programs funded through the New York State Office of Mental Health has fallen forty to seventy percent behind inflation.

The net result of these consistent cuts have put the existing system of 40,000 housing units in peril. There are more and more complex needs of individuals being served in these programs at the same time as there has been minimal funding increases.

Though we support and thank the Governor for the proposed ten million dollars added in the '2019 budget for existing housing programs, there must be more funding to ensure that our families are well served by housing providers.

Housing funded through OMH helps keep individuals out of hospitals, homeless shelters and jails and prisons. It is less expensive for taxpayers and a much better outcome for peers.

*Recommendation:*

- We support our colleagues at ACL and the Bring It Home campaign in calling for funding increases for housing providers.

**Reinvestment**

We are appreciative of the legislature's continued commitment to reinvesting the money from bed closures in New York's psychiatric facilities and adding the funding back into community services. The community funding system is dramatically underfunded.

We also thank Governor Cuomo and OMH Commissioner Sullivan for their continued commitment to this community funding. For every hospital bed that closes, there is \$110,000 added to the community mental health budget to spend in the priority areas around housing, peer services, family engagement, jail diversion and a myriad of other community-based programs that help enhance individual recovery.

This year's budget proposes closure of 100 beds that would result in \$11 million added to community services. This would bring the total annualized reinvestment allocation to over \$100 million a year. MHANYS strongly support this investment.

*Recommendation:*

- We urge the legislature to support the proposed closure of the 100 psychiatric beds and insuring that this funding is reinvested into community support.

**Prescriber Prevails**

As advocates for people with mental health related issues, there are few things more frustrating than having to fight a proposed cut to prescriber prevails for mental health and other medications.

This was a hard fought consumer victory led every year by the Legislature to ensure that individuals on Medicaid have the ability to work with their prescriber to ensure access to the most appropriate medication whether or not it is in a plan's formulary.

Why would you not want the expertise of prescribers to help navigate the best course of action for an individual?

*Recommendation:*

- We urge you to continue the leadership you have provided in the past in adding back the protection of prescriber prevails to mental health and other medications for individuals on Medicaid.

**Criminal Justice Reform**

For many years, Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) has been the evidence-based model for helping law enforcement respond to crisis through better engaging families and peers. Also for many years, New York was behind the curve in this funding despite the tireless efforts of many in the advocacy community.

This has changed over the last several years as New York has become a leader in this area. There are now dozens of CIT teams throughout New York State. This has come about because of the leadership of our Mental Hygiene Chairs who have worked tirelessly in funding this initiative.

*Recommendation:*

- We urge additional support in this year's budget funding for CIT and expand counties participating in the program.

Along with our colleagues at NYAPRS and NAMI, MHANYS is also very supportive of the HALT legislation. While we are focused on budget, this criminal justice initiative is significant and would be a great legislative victory for all New Yorkers.

This legislation would ban solitary confinement for many vulnerable populations including individuals with mental health related issues. For people with existing mental health related issues such as trauma and depression having to be placed in solitary confinement is incredibly punitive and only serve to make outcomes much worse for individuals.

*Recommendation:*

- We urge all of your support for the HALT Legislation.

**Veterans and Mental Health**

As we have said time and time again, it is an honor to work with several veterans groups around mental health issues. These are the heroes who should be treated with great respect in our society but too often they are not given the services and supports that they vitally need.

It is a disgrace to treat someone with a mental health issue with disrespect and dishonor and it is only magnified when those who have served the country so honorably are treated this way.

That is why we so strongly support the Senate in their funding of the Joseph Dwyer Mental Health Peer Support program. These county programs, including some run proudly through our MHAs, have provided the necessary supports, resources and education to our veterans. As part of our annual Mental Health Matters Legislative Day, we have busloads of veterans come up to share their stories. It is an incredibly moving experience.

I want to personally thank the Senate Mental Hygiene Chair, Robert Ortt and Senator Thomas Croci for their leadership in funding of the Dwyer program.

*Recommendation:*

- We urge continued support for the Dwyer funding and expand the number of counties that are participating in the program.

**Mental Health Public Awareness through Mental Health First Aid**

As referenced in the beginning of the testimony, much has changed in recent years in regard to public awareness of mental health. A lot of it is to all of your collective credit.

One of the fundamental parts of public awareness is Mental Health First Aid. Through the leadership of Senator Ortt, we have received funding to spread the word about this eight hour training. Much like regular first aid, mental health first aid helps to respond to individuals in a crisis situation as well as enhance education about mental health.

Through this funding, we have been able to train over one hundred of our affiliate members who have the ability to train individuals across New York State. This funding has helped lead to thousands of people being trained and it is greatly appreciated.

*Recommendation:*

- We are urging continued support for MHFA funding in this year budget and working with the State and legislature to help provide a coordinated care strategy for mental health public awareness.

**Children's Mental Health**

Through our members running children and youth services and MHANYS being engaged with children's mental health through the school mental health education initiative, we are very supportive of children's mental health services and support.

*Recommendation:*

- We stand with our colleagues at Families Together and the New York State Coalition for Children's Mental Health Services in urging the Legislature to work with the administration to decrease the two year delay of the children's managed care initiative. The funding that would be saved in delaying will be minimal to the value of accelerating the pace of the waiver for children desperately in need of services.

**Adult Home Reform**

As part of the New York State Coalition for Adult Reform, we are concerned about the proposed SSI increase for adult homes in New York State.

There are clearly many adult homes throughout New York State doing good work with small profit margins and will better serve their residents with an SSI increase. There are also many adult homes

in New York State that have continued to profit from individuals by providing minimal care for residents.

Our concern is for the residents. We strongly believe that you cannot increase SSI without an equal percentage increase to residents Personal Needs Allowance (PNA). At MHANYS, we are not opposed to an SSI increase, but we are calling for increased PNA for residents. Residents currently get less than fifty dollars a week to live on. Think about that for a moment about the difficulty of living on two hundred dollars a month. It is virtually impossible to live a quality life that is focused on recovery and wellness given that limited amount of funding.

*Recommendation:*

- We urge support for an SSI funding increase that must be tied to a residents' PNA.

### **Geriatric Mental Health**

We are proud that the Geriatric Mental Health movement started from our Mental Health Association in New York City and has since become statewide in their impact in recognizing the needs of the aging population and their mental health concerns.

The Governor has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting aging New Yorkers. However, we strongly believe there should be an increased commitment to the mental health of all New Yorkers; successful aging is predicated on good mental health.

When the Geriatric Mental Health legislation was signed into law twelve years ago, it set up demonstration projects across New York State. The projects continue to exist and are providing the seed work for expansion of geriatric mental health services. The reality is that it is impossible to expand the scope without new funding. There has been no new funding increase since the demonstration projects were created twelve years ago.

*Recommendation:*

- We urge a million dollar increase for the demonstration projects for geriatric mental health.
- We also strongly support the State's initiative around expansion of twenty ACT teams. We urge that at least four of these teams take into consideration the needs of special populations including older adults.

### **Gambling Addiction and Mental Health**

MHANYS would like to express our concern over the impending expansion of gambling in New York State and the impact that will have on those with a mental health related issue. With the increase in expansion, we know that there will also be an increase in accessibility and therefore a percentage will suffer resultant gambling problems. Sixty percent of individuals suffering from Disordered Gambling, the most severe form of the problem, are also suffering from a co-occurring psychiatric disorder. Shockingly, over 17% of gamblers have attempted suicide. This is one of the highest ratios of any population of people with addictions and we need the collaborative efforts of OMH and OASAS and the Legislature to help stem that tide.



*Recommendation:*

- We urge that appropriate funds be dedicated to problem gambling research, education, prevention, treatment and recovery to mitigate the impacts.

**Medicaid Matters**

Medicaid matters should matter to all New Yorkers given that there are over five million New Yorker's currently on Medicaid. Regarding mental health specifically, over fifty percent of the funding of New York's public mental health system is leveraged through Medicaid.

We are concerned about the impact from the federal government of the proposed cuts. We strongly support the leadership of the Governor and the Legislature in looking to mitigate any federal cuts.

However, we are concerned that in this year's State budget, there is language that could impact consumer choice and delay transition to the community for many individuals in need.

*Recommendation:*

- We strongly support the legislative agenda of Medicaid Matters regarding consumer protections and providing independence in the community for peers and other individuals on Medicaid.

**SUMMARY**

This year is very challenging and to request funding in this environment could be thought of as unrealistic. The reality is that funding for community supports is essential and to not advocate for more funding would only continue to diminish supports and services for those in greatest need.

Community mental health is the ultimate safety net for hundreds of thousands of New Yorker and on a daily basis we are providing support, recovery and community services. Without more resources and funding, we are destined to have to turn away people who most need mental health supports and services. Many of these people will end up in emergency rooms, prisons or homeless without support. That would be shameful and not representative of the values of all of us as New Yorkers.

We thank you for your time and consideration.