

CalLEN-LORDE

SENATE FINANCE AND ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS JOINT LEGISLATIVE HEARING: HEALTH STATE FISCAL YEAR 2024-25 EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEALTH AND MEDICAID

JANUARY 23, 2024

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Callen-Lorde Community Health Center is a growing community health center with a mission to reach lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities, as well as people living with HIV, in New York City and beyond. In 2022-23, Callen-Lorde served more than 18,581 patients from its Chelsea, Bronx and Brooklyn locations. More than 20 percent of our patients are living with HIV and 32 percent identify as transgender or gender non-binary. Fifty eight percent of our patients are uninsured or have public insurance. Our patients are people who have been systemically excluded from healthcare, housing, and economic stability. They also live, or come from, disinvested geographic communities.

Callen-Lorde is pleased to have the opportunity to submit written testimony to highlight the issues and priorities in the FY25 Executive Budget that most impact our patient community and our organization.

Callen-Lorde supports the Executive's proposals to End Preventable Epidemics (Article VII, Part T).

Further, Callen-Lorde supports **\$3.5M in funding to further streamline HIV testing** by conforming NYS Public Health Law Section 2781 with current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and New York State guidance to facilitate increased and improved HIV testing. Callen-Lorde recommends amending the Executive budget language to mirror the language **in A.8475 Paulin/ S.7809 Hoylman-Sigal** legislation, which passed recently in the Assembly.

\$10M Advance PrEP Equity: PrEP uptake has been slow among persons of color, women and among New Yorkers over 50. Achieving *equality* in PrEP utilization will not alone reduce the disparity in new HIV diagnoses. Resources are needed for tailored

and culturally competent PrEP outreach and services to reduce disparities and disease burden ultimately to achieve health *equity*.

Invest in Primary Care

Current community health center Medicaid rates were created in 1999 and have not increased to keep up with changes to the way health care is delivered. According to the Urban Institute [[link](#)], operating costs exceed the ceiling on Medicaid payments – part of the prospective payment system (PPS) methodology – by at least 44 percent for most patient visits. Callen-Lorde’s PPS rate is only 62 percent of the cost per patient visit. We join our statewide primary health care association in respectfully urging the New York State Legislature to including the language of **A.7560/S.6959** in the budget to ensure the State begins the process to reform health center payment rates to reflect the new, expanded model of health and social care that is the hallmark of CHCs. In conjunction with these efforts, Callen-Lorde requests the Legislature to include an immediate 25% increase in health center Medicaid rates in its one house budget bills.

Extend Access to Care with Full Telehealth Reimbursement Parity

Callen-Lorde asks the Legislature to insert the technical correction included in **A.7316/S.6733**, to their one house budgets. Doing so will bring community health centers (CHCs), all licensed under Article 28 of the public health law, under the same payment policy as Article 31 and 32 licensed clinics. This would provide full reimbursement parity, regardless of patient or provider location, for in-person, audio-only and audio-visual telehealth delivered at CHCs and would allow health centers to receive their full PPS rate. Callen-Lorde could extend its access to virtual care and recoup approximately **\$3.2M annually**.

Interstate Licensure Compacts (HMH Part R)

Callen-Lorde supports Governor Hochul’s proposal for New York State to join the Interstate Medical Compact for physicians and the Interstate Nurse Licensure Compact for registered nurses and licensed practice nurses.

Protect New York’s Safety Net

Callen-Lorde asks the Legislature to ensure the continuation of funding for the NYRx Reinvestment pool. The FY24 enacted budget created a mechanism to mitigate the detrimental impacts on community health centers of the pharmacy benefit carve out and ensuing loss of 340B savings. The budget included \$135M (state share) for CHCs and \$50M for Ryan White clinics. This funding has been vital to sustaining critical services for Callen-Lorde and our sister clinics across the state. These include – but are not limited to – low-cost medications, food/nutrition programs, transportation, mobile dental clinics, STI prevention programs and vaccination efforts to address outbreaks of infectious disease. We ask the Legislature to continue its support for this critical funding in this year’s budget and in perpetuity.

Callen-Lorde applauds Governor Hochul's proposals to ensure TGNCNB individuals can access the highest quality affirming care in New York.

Specifically, Callen-Lorde urges New York State Department of Health (DOH) to amend its regulation and policies governing Medicaid coverage for medically necessary gender affirming care to comply with the updated and revised Standards of Care (SOC) for the Health of Transgender and Gender Diverse People, Version 8 published by World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH).

DOH should promptly issue a Notice of Proposed Rule Making reflecting the following changes:

- Accepting a **single opinion** from a qualified professional for assessing TGD individuals seeking treatment.
- Amending the section on qualified health professionals to reflect that all medical and behavioral health providers working within the scope of their practice are qualified to assess and recommend patients for surgery, not limited to providers with doctoral degrees or mental health providers.
- Removing the requirement for social gender transition.
- Eliminating the requirement for mental health treatment.
- Removing current hormone requirements for surgeries.
- Clarifying coverage for **all medically necessary** surgeries, not just limited to specific procedures.
- Providing health care for non-binary individuals

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. For more information, please contact Kimberleigh Smith at 212-271-7184 or ksmith@callen-lorde.org