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**“Nothing About Us,
Without Us”**

Testimony of Friends of Recovery New York (FOR-NY)

**New York State Senate Finance Committee and
New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee**

February 3, 2016

**Presented by:
Robert J. Lindsey, M.Ed.
Chief Executive Officer
Friends of Recovery New York
(FOR-NY)**

Silent No More! Invest in Addiction Recovery NOW!

I am Robert J. Lindsey and as CEO of Friends of Recovery New York and I am honored to be invited to today's hearing to discuss how we can address the public health crisis of addiction in New York State.

Friends of Recovery New York represents the voice of individuals and families living in recovery from addiction, families who have lost a family member or people who have been otherwise impacted by addiction. The stigma and shame that surrounds addiction has prevented millions of individuals and family members from seeking help. FOR-NY is dedicated to breaking down the barriers created by stigma that result in discrimination and policies that block or interfere with recovery: access to addiction treatment, healthcare, housing, education and employment.

And, because of stigma, many of the 23 million Americans living life in recovery from alcohol and drug addiction have been unwilling to come forward and speak out. NO MORE! Our voice of lived experience in recovery must be heard and must serve as a guide for all efforts to address this crisis!

Regrettably, on a daily basis, the heart-breaking tragedy of active addiction is played out in countless media stories, in community forums, in homes and families all across New York State. FOR-NY wants to thank the Governor and the members of the Senate and Assembly for **LISTENING** to the people of New York in an effort to respond to this crisis. But, **Now is the time to ACT!**

CALL TO ACTION- BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS:

As you know, the State Budget is more than a statutory requirement- it is a *statement of priorities* for the policy activities of state government. Clearly, addressing the addiction crisis in our communities is not a priority.

As taxpayers, state funding for OASAS, and local community-based prevention, treatment and recovery support services is grossly inadequate to meet the needs of the individuals and families of New York. We are extremely grateful to OASAS for all of what they are able to do with so little financial support. The Combat Heroin PSA's, Kitchen Table Toolkit, leadership in enacting insurance laws in support of access to addiction treatment and recent announced investment in Youth Clubhouses and in Recovery Community and Outreach Centers represent critically important leadership.

However, the budget overall, remains underinvested in the solution- prevention, treatment and recovery and overinvested in paying the tab for active addiction. As a matter of policy, it is:

- Time to **STOP** Investing in the **PROBLEM**- Active Addiction and
- Time to **START** Investing in the **SOLUTION**- Addiction Recovery:

FOR-NY RECOVERY 2016-17 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

Like our response to any other chronic disease, our efforts must focus on prevention, treatment and recovery. Although we are engaged in and supportive of prevention, treatment and addiction enforcement, our budget recommendations are specific to recovery support services:

\$50 Million Investment in Recovery Support Services Infrastructure

The single greatest gap in the addiction treatment into recovery continuum is the lack of recovery support services following primary treatment. FOR-NY asks for the immediate investment of \$50 million to build a strong statewide network of local recovery support services for individuals and families focused on minimizing relapse and maximizing the changes needed for sustained recovery.

1. A Recovery Community Organization in Every County = \$10 Million

Recovery Community Organizations (RCO's) are independent non-profits, led and governed by people in recovery, as well as their family members, friends and allies who mobilize resources within and outside of the recovery community to make it possible for people with the chronic disease of addiction to find long-term recovery. Each organization has a mission that reflects the particular issues and concerns of its community.

2. A Recovery Community Center in Every County = \$20 Million

Recovery Community Centers (RCC's) are committed to supporting a person's efforts to prevent relapse and should relapse occur, to quickly return to recovery. Community demand for services is overwhelming. OASAS received more than 90 proposals to start Recovery Community Centers and Youth Clubhouses, but only has sufficient funds to support 6 RCC's and 7 Youth Clubhouses.

3. Peer Recovery Coaches in Every County = \$10 Million

Peer Recovery Coaches are highly effective peers with lived experience in addiction and recovery who are trained to serve as mentors and guides. Coaches typically work with individuals and families seeking recovery to help remove barriers, assist in navigating systems and connecting to needed resources, all of which resulted in reduced relapse and improved recovery outcomes. We propose two full-time Recovery Coaches for each RCC in every county.

4. Family Support Navigators in Every County = \$10 Million

Family Support Navigators will be located in existing, neutral, non-treatment provider, community based resource centers, RCC's and RCO's (\$150,000 per county) to provide information, referrals, insurance navigation, treatment options, recovery support services, family education, and family recovery support – for the family as primary clients.

Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs)	\$10 million
Recovery Community Centers (RCCs)	\$20 million
Peer Recovery Coaches	\$10 million
Family Support Recovery Navigators	\$10 million
Total ---	\$50 million

Commitment to Partnership for Success:

Money alone cannot solve this problem. Thousands of people in recovery, their families and families who have lost family members stand ready to partner with you to do anything they can to end this crisis and support recovery in their community. They will contribute millions of dollars in volunteer service, raise local funds and mobilize their local communities to create and sustain a culture of recovery. But, they cannot do their job without the \$50 million investment in the recovery supports infrastructure.

Enforce Insurance Parity and Expand Access to Addiction Treatment

Although the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) was signed into law in 2008 and the Affordable Health Care Act signed in 2010, individuals and families across New York State are still being denied life-saving addiction treatment because the laws are still not fully implemented. We ask that the Governor and the NYS Legislature do more to enforce insurance and parity laws in New York. We must hold insurers accountable to guarantee that addiction treatment and recovery services are accessible to all.

Treatment on Demand – With proper treatment and recovery support, recovery from addiction is possible. It is unconscionable that individuals must "hit bottom", be forced to wait weeks before they can access treatment or go out of state to receive care in states like Florida, Minnesota, California or Pennsylvania. Insurers, providers, state and county government must all work together with recovery community organizations to ensure that immediate access to treatment becomes the norm rather than the exception. Anyone who needs treatment must have access to treatment on demand as with other medical conditions.

Legislation and Regulation: In addition, we recognize that there are number of priority issues that must be addressed through legislation or regulation and FOR-NY stands ready to work with the Governor and Legislature to address these issues. Our priority issues are as follows:

ADDICTION & RECOVERY SAFEGUARDS

Physician Education - We support regulations which would reduce the addictive use of prescription drugs and ensure that the medical community receives continuing education that is up-to-date with respect to addiction and recovery. Healthcare practitioners prescribing controlled medications must be currently informed on the subject matter of addiction treatment and recovery.

Treatment Regulations for People on Suboxone - We support enactment of regulations requiring concurrent counseling treatment with the use of suboxone. Evidence-based research supports the critical need for people receiving Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) to have corresponding therapeutic support.

Regulation of Sober Recovery Homes - We support increased improvements in standardized regulatory and quality assurance approaches to recovery homes. Individuals in early recovery must be protected and afforded a safe and supportive living environment. Regulations and supervision must be adopted in a manner that works within the parameters of the Federal Fair Housing Act.

Evaluation, Assessment and Referral after Overdose Reversal - We support the creation of proactive interventions to assist those in crisis after receiving emergency Narcan to reverse an opiate overdose. In most instances, no treatment intervention occurs (or any referral at all) and there are numerous reports of additional overdose and in some cases even death. Mechanisms for evaluation, other assessment, treatment referrals and *warm handoffs* to recovery coaches and peer supports must be offered, implemented and made immediately available upon request to help save lives.

Improve Outcomes for Those in Treatment and Recovery with Current or Former Criminal Justice Involvement - We support the removal of barriers that make it difficult for individuals with criminal records to access treatment, sustain recovery and have the same access to housing, employment, healthcare, and education as other New Yorkers.

Closing Comment: The following quote comes from the testimony of a family member, in recovery, at the “**Recovery Talks- Community Listening Forum**” hosted by FOR-NY and our local RCO- Recovery Advocacy in Saratoga (RAIS) in Saratoga Springs, NY:

“Finally, recovery is made up of many miracles, but finding a place for help should not have to be one of them.”



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Mission and Vision

WHO? “Friends of Recovery - NY is comprised of NYS residents who are in long-term recovery from addiction, their families, friends and allies. We represent all sectors of the community, all regions of the state, and the numerous and diverse paths to recovery. We actively organize and mobilize the recovery community so as to speak effectively with one voice.”

WHAT? “Our mission is to demonstrate the power and proof of recovery from addictions and its value to individuals, families and communities throughout NYS and the nation. We actively seek to advance public policies and practices that promote and support recovery.”

WHY? “We envision a world in which recovery from addiction is both a commonplace and a celebrated reality, a world in which the entire spectrum of effective prevention, treatment and recovery support services are available and accessible to all who might benefit from them.

FOR-NY Believes:

- Recovery is possible for everyone
- Everyone achieves recovery in his or her own way
- Adequate resources and support are necessary for sustained recovery
- Recovery is about reclaiming a meaningful life and role in society

FOR-NY Stands For:

- Addressing addiction as a public health issue
- Responding to illicit drug use as a health issue rather than a crime
- Eliminating barriers to getting help
- Developing non-punitive, non-judgmental recovery service models
- Creating a system that engages and supports people to reclaim a meaningful life
- Including recovering individuals and our families at all levels of budget and policy development in the system