



Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities

Winter 2013-2014 Newsletter

Sheldon Silver, Speaker • Aileen M. Gunther, Chair

Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

First and foremost, it is my great honor to serve you in my role as Chair of the Assembly Standing Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. We are in a period of great transition, making it critical that we work together to ensure that people with mental illness receive the services they need.

With the state's roll-out of the Olmstead Plan, it is incumbent upon us to look at each person holistically and work with them, their families and service providers to develop a plan that assures access to treatment and support in the least restrictive setting possible.

Below, you will find information about the Office of Mental Health's Regional Centers of Excellence Plan and how the Committee is actively responding to the proposal. I have worked diligently to ensure that stakeholders, including service recipients, families, service providers and community members, have the opportunity to voice their concerns about these changes. This is vital to developing a sound understanding of these complex issues and allows for meaningful policy to be developed and implemented.

These changes pose significant challenges, but I have every hope that, working together, we will overcome these challenges and distinguish ourselves as a state that provides convenient access to quality care for every person who needs it.

Sincerely,

Aileen M. Gunther, Chair

Regional Centers of Excellence

In July, the Office of Mental Health (OMH) published a plan to redesign state-operated inpatient services. The plan outlined OMH's vision of a new system of care for New Yorkers with psychiatric disabilities, including the closure of several state psychiatric centers and conversion of the remaining fifteen psychiatric centers into "Regional Centers of Excellence." Under the plan, the Regional Centers of Excellence (RCEs) would serve specific populations, including children, adults and individuals involved in the criminal justice system. According to the published report, OMH plans to create "community hubs" in areas that will be affected by psychiatric facility closures. The hubs will remain an integral part of the community providing clinical and non-clinical outpatient services.

The Assembly Standing Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities in conjunction with the Senate Standing Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities and the Standing Committee on Health, took over 20 hours of testimony in hearings across New York State on the potential impacts of the RCE plan on service recipients, families, employees and communities. Hearings were held at SUNY Farmingdale, due to the anticipated closure of Sagamore Children's Psychiatric Center in Dix Hills; at the Ogdensburg City Council Chambers, due to the anticipated

closure of St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center; and at the Middletown City Council Chambers, to discuss the proposed closure of Mid-Hudson Forensic Psychiatric Center. The Assembly Standing Committee also conducted a hearing in Binghamton to discuss the planned closures of Elmira Psychiatric Center and the Greater Binghamton Health Center.

The hearings allowed the Committees to better understand the needs of the communities that would be affected by facility closures, specifically in terms of resources that need to be reinvested into the communities in order to sustain or enhance mental health services in the region. We need a comprehensive analysis of regional needs, including an inventory of housing; availability of transportation; an assessment of community-based services for children, as well as adults; and convenient and reliable access to care.



Assemblywoman Gunther listens to testimony from over fifty witnesses regarding the proposed closure of St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center, Ogdensburg, NY.

Communities of Excellence Mental Health Reinvestment Act

Throughout the series of statewide hearings, the Committees consistently heard of the need to create a strategic reinvestment policy for communities that would be losing a psychiatric center.

Earlier this year, I introduced Assembly bill 7842-B which would establish the "Communities of Excellence Mental Health Reinvestment Act." This legislation will require the Office of Mental Health to do an inventory and valuation of the existing state facilities and services, establish a plan for the transition to the Regional Centers of Excellence, and determine short- and long-term sav-

ings from the reduction of beds, wards, units, buildings and real property that are currently part of the in-patient psychiatric hospital system.

From those savings, 50% will be allocated to the Office of Mental Health for the structural and staffing needs of the Regional Centers of Excellence. The other 50% will be directed to Local Government Units to contract with not-for-profit and other licensed and approved providers of community-based mental health services.

Further Information

Access to services plays a key role in screening, treatment, and recovery. Knowing how to obtain information can sometimes be difficult and overwhelming. Below is important information on a variety of services available to New Yorkers.

Mental Health Services

New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH)

- Visit the OMH website at www.omh.state.ny.us to search for mental health programs by county, program category, or subcategories, including addresses and phone numbers of service providers in your community.
- If you have questions or complaints about mental health services in New York State you may call: **1-800-597-8481**
- Also, if you are in crisis OMH provides this toll-free line: **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

Suicide Prevention

The New York State Suicide Prevention Resource Center website (www.sprc.org) provides information that includes:

- Contact Information
- Recent Developments
- State Events
- State and Local Prevention Resources

Or, if you know someone who is in suicidal crisis, call **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

Services for Veterans

- A list of VA and Vet Center facilities can be found online at: www.va.gov or call the VA's general helpline at **1-800-827-1000**

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Assemblywoman Gunther leads a committee meeting to discuss and move significant pieces of legislation.

Contact Assemblywoman Aileen M. Gunther

District Offices:

18 Anawana Lake Road • Monticello, NY 12701
845-794-5807

16 James Street, 3rd Floor • Middletown, NY 10940
845-342-9304

Albany Office:

LOB 826 • Albany, NY 12248
518-455-5355

gunthea@assembly.state.ny.us