



Aileen M. Gunther  
Member of Assembly  
100th District

THE ASSEMBLY  
STATE OF NEW YORK  
ALBANY

CHAIR  
Mental Health Committee

CHAIR  
Subcommittee on Women's Health

COMMITTEES  
Agriculture  
Environmental Conservation  
Health  
Racing and Wagering

February 11, 2021

Honorable Carl E. Heastie  
Speaker, New York State Assembly  
Legislative Office Building, Room 932  
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Speaker Heastie:

We write to respectfully urge the Assembly to support the Executive Budget's \$1.5 million appropriation for the Community Health Access to Addiction and Mental Healthcare Project (CHAMP), funded by the Office of Addiction Supports and Services (OASAS) and Office of Mental Health (OMH) to help individuals, their families, and their providers overcome insurance barriers in accessing and providing substance use disorder and mental health services.

New Yorkers with substance use disorder and mental health issues, their families, and providers face immense insurance barriers to access necessary care and are more likely to resort to "out-of-network" behavioral health services than other medical care. COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the state's mental health and substance use crisis. Indeed, CHAMP's helpline has seen a 45% increase in calls related to accessing treatment problems.

CHAMP, a first-in-the-nation independent behavioral health insurance ombudsman program, is uniquely positioned to be responsive to the emerging needs of these New Yorkers. Whether accessing care, appealing an insurance denial, or negotiating a medical bill, CHAMP is able to obtain a favorable outcome for its clients in 91% of its cases. Since its October 1, 2018 launch, CHAMP has assisted more than 2,600 clients in accessing substance use disorder and mental health treatment. Moreover, it has educated over 236,000 individuals and health care providers about their legal rights related to insurance coverage. Furthermore, it has reported systemic issues related to patients' ability to access substance use and mental health services in New York State.

The \$1.5 million appropriation will ensure that New Yorkers affected by the opioid and suicide epidemics can rely on CHAMP to navigate the healthcare system and get their care during this crisis and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

M/A Aileen M. Gunther

M/A Chris Tague

M/A Andrew Hevesi

M/A Jake Ashby

M/A Anna R. Kelles

M/A Jarrett Gandolfo

M/A Catherine Nolan

M/A John Lemondes

M/A Emily Gallagher

M/A Karl Brabenec

M/A Gina Sillitti

M/A Jessica González-Rojas

M/A Jo Anne Simon

M/A John T. McDonald III

M/A Linda B. Rosenthal

M/A Marianne Buttenschon

M/A Monica P. Wallace

M/A Rebecca A. Seawright

M/A Sarah Clark

M/A Angelo J. Morinello

M/A Brian Manktelow