

Testimony, Joint Legislative Public Hearing

2016-2017 Executive Budget Proposal: Topic "Mental Hygiene"

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Statewide PEF/OPWDD Labor Management Committee Labor Chair

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Good day distinguished Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Committee Members. My name is Ed Snow, and I am the Statewide OPWDD/PEF Labor Management Committee Labor Chair. I have been employed by the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) since 1984 in an array of direct care titles and my current title is ICF Program Manager 1.

I have worked my whole career involved in the "transformation" of OPWDD from an institutional based agency to one that has its primary function as an oversight agency for the developmentally disabled. Perhaps in my lifetime I will see the full transformation, although I hope the transformation works to the benefit of all the people we serve in our service delivery system.

In 2015, a Transformation Panel was formed to share and discuss ideas to help shape the future of the OPWDD system. The panel members included individuals with developmental disabilities, parents, providers and advocates. CSEA (Civil Service Employees Association) was included on the panel, but Public Employee Federation was not

This year's budget includes an investment of \$120 million for OPWDD New Service Opportunity. The total investment of the \$ 120 million will be for the development of private provider services and will not provide for any state-operated opportunities with this investment, hence, diminishing the need for services provided by PEF members.

This year's budget proposes \$ 15 million to expand Crisis Services. Our members have been an integral part of the START program in the Hudson Valley/ Capital area. This program has utilized highly skilled and experienced members of the state workforce to reduce the dependency on higher levels of services. I would encourage OPWDD to continue to utilize the skill and experience of its workforce in the continual development of the START program versus using less experienced staff of private agencies.

OPWDD via the budget proposal wishes to dedicate \$ 24 million to transition people to more appropriate community based settings. Although OPWDD indicates this transition will include a combination of not for profit and state-operated services

integrated with community support systems, a very small amount of the 152 individuals will be supported through state-operated services.

As I so far, I have spent most of my career working for OPWDD. I worked at the Rome Developmental Center in Rome, New York and worked through its closure to a 100% community based service group. The transition was timely and well planned and provided fall back services to the most challenging people. Private agencies have always been part of the OPWDD delivery system leaving the most challenging people in need of services to be served by highly skilled and experienced state workforce in State operated programs. The Executive budget includes a decrease of \$ 21.4 million in support of OPWDD state-operated facilities.

Although I have witnessed many success stories where people with developmental disabilities have moved from restrictive environments to situations that served their needs in a less restrictive environment and my colleagues and I have seen many positive changes in our careers in the delivery system, we are more concerned about the failures and the reason those failures have occurred. I/we believe that a total dismantling of the current system is not in the best interest of the most challenging of people and that those people will continue to need the services of our skilled and experienced professional employees.

In closing, I would like to bring to your attention concerns raised by many of my colleagues regarding the Justice Center. The role of the Justice Center in OPWDD facilities needs to undergo a complete and thorough review to see if practices can be altered to allow less disruption to the overall functioning of OPWDD programs. Justice Center involvement has placed many staff members in unjustified professional jeopardy and has caused many to undergo great financial and emotional hardships. Justice Center involvement has deterred professionals from seeking employment in OPWDD due to the potential risk of professional licensing/ Medicaid exclusionary complications stemming from false allegations and/or faulty determinations.

Thank you for taking time to consider the concerns and recommendations that I have brought forth for your consideration.