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**“Nothing About Us,  
Without Us”**

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

**2019 Joint Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene  
February 7, 2019**

**Presented by:**

**Allison Weingarten, *Friends of Recovery New York***  
**Kellie Roe, *Second Chance Opportunities and FOR-Albany***  
**Sue Martin, *Recovery Advocacy in Saratoga***  
**Bennett Reiss, *Long Island Recovery Association***

I am Allison Weingarten and as the Interim Executive Director of Friends of Recovery- New York and a person in recovery and family member, I am honored to be invited by Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair Weinstein and Senate Finance Committee Chair Krueger. We are also joined today by leaders in recovery from Albany County- Kellie Roe with Second Chance Opportunities; Sue Martin from Recovery Advocacy in Saratoga and Bennett Reiss from the Long Island Recovery Association.

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 negative public perception 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 negative public perception that result in discrimination and policies that block or interfere with accessing recovery support services: access to addiction treatment, healthcare; housing, education and employment.

FOR-NY also works to build an infrastructure around the state through local Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) that build supports for people living in recovery and others in need. Our network of RCOs are strongly in support of life saving, evidence based practices to support people seeking recovery.

To start, we want to commend Governor Andrew Cuomo, OASAS Commissioner Arlene González-Sánchez and the legislature for their collaboration in order to provide more support for recovery support services in New York State than ever before. OASAS is now funding:

- Friends of Recovery – New York a statewide organization to train and empower local recovery community organizations to end negative public perception of people in recovery or struggling with addiction and to build recovery capital around the State.
- \$200,000 per year to provide scholarships to those interested in becoming a Certified Recovery Peer Advocate
- Recovery Community and Outreach Centers- serving 16 counties, and 5 on the way
- 18 Youth Clubhouses throughout the state
- Peer Engagement Specialists serving 28 counties
- Family Support Navigators serving 35 counties
- 24/7 Open Access Centers serving 7 counties
- Center of Treatment Innovations serving 34 counties and 8 tribal territories
- Addiction Resource Centers – 1 in each of the 10 regions of the state.

It is thanks to these resources that thousands of New Yorkers are being served by evidence based programming every day and we are extremely grateful for these services and resources.

We know, however, that more resources and support is needed to combat addiction and support recovery.

In 2017 nationwide, 72,000 people (that we know of) died of an opioid overdose and 88,000 died from alcohol related deaths. New York has been significantly impacted. 3,638 New Yorkers died from drug overdose in 2016, an increase of 31% from 2015 and 61% from 2014. We are still awaiting New York's overdose fatality numbers for 2017.

The following are our top three asks for the FY 2020 Budget and Legislative Session as well as our position on the pending Recreational Marijuana Legislation.

**ASK #1: Increase Funding: Last year there was \$200 million proposed for the FY 2019 Budget- this is the same amount proposed for this year! We need an increase!**

- We calculate that we need approximately **\$40 million** in additional funding in order to provide services including Recovery Community Organizations, Recovery Community and Outreach Centers, Recovery Youth Clubhouses, Peer Engagement Specialists and Family Support Navigators in each county in NYS
- These services are evidence based and will save lives!

**ASK #2: Certification of Recovery Housing that support Medicated Assisted Treatment and Recovery**

- Individuals in early recovery must be protected and afforded a supportive living environment. We support a standardized certification of recovery housing. We suggest using the standards created by the National Alliance for Recovery Residences (NARR).
- Regulations and supervision must be adopted within the parameters of the Federal Fair Housing Act in a manner that promotes integrity, upholds residents' rights, are recovery-oriented and conducive to optimum health and well-being.
- Certified recovery housing must also be supportive of individuals who use medication to help sustain their recovery.

**ASK #3 Support the Governor's proposed Parity Package**

- FOR- NY in particular is in support of the provisions of the package which (1) Require hospitals to make Medication Assisted Treatment (Buprenorphine) available in Emergency Departments (2) Limit co-payments for SUD outpatient to a single co-payment for one treatment visit; and (3) Creates a tax credit for employers who hire individuals who are in recovery room SUD.

**FOR-NY Statement on Recreational Marijuana Legislation**

FOR-NY, in alliance with others in the prevention, treatment and recovery community, strongly advocates that funds in the NYS Budget be included to support a statewide education campaign utilizing OASAS prevention programs that includes factual, scientific information about the risks associated with marijuana use, including the education of children, parents, young adults, adults and the medical community. We support an investment in the prevention, treatment, and recovery service infrastructure to prevent use and prepare for the consequences of problematic marijuana use meaning an investment in treatment and recovery support services to support those who are unable to just use the drug "recreationally" but develop an addiction and need help. In order to support this investment, we believe a substantial percentage of tax revenue associated with legalized marijuana should be allocated to OASAS for prevention, treatment and recovery services.

And below is our full policy statement which was developed with the input of local Recovery Community Organizations all over the state.

**CONTINUUM, QUALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF CARE**

**Creation, expansion and certification of recovery homes** – Housing has been identified as the number one priority throughout our communities statewide. Officials must ensure that resources are dedicated to meet this rapidly growing need. We support an initiative that would commit funds directly to housing for individuals in recovery from Substance Use Disorders. We also support regulations and certification of recovery homes.

Individuals in early recovery must be afforded a safe, supportive living environment. Regulations and supervision must be adopted within the parameters of the Federal Fair Housing Act in a manner that encompasses those using Medication Assisted Treatment to support individualized treatment and recovery. Such housing must promote integrity, ensure quality improvement, uphold residents' rights, be recovery-oriented, and conducive to well-being. We support the creation and expansion of a variety of recovery residences statewide which will include and embrace those receiving MAT to support their recovery in order to meet a rapidly increasing demand.

**Recovery community resources** - Fund at least one Recovery Community Organization (RCO), Recovery Community Outreach Center (RCOC) and Youth Clubhouse in each county and ensure that at least two Certified Recovery Peer Advocates and two Certified Family Support Navigators exist in every county in NYS. The peers and navigators must be attached to existing or emerging RCO's to ensure a continuation and expansion of inroads made through existing recovery community networks with real time knowledge of conditions on the ground in local communities.

**Support/Establish Recovery High Schools and Collegiate Recovery Programs throughout New York State** - Recovery High schools are effective and the accompanying Alternative Peer Groups (APG's), utilized in Texas have been shown to reduce recidivism and dramatically improve recovery outcomes for young people. These high schools and collegiate programs could work closely with youth clubhouses and local RCO's to maximize access to peer recovery support services in the community.

**Treatment and Recovery on demand and connection to recovery support services after overdose** - It is unconscionable that individuals must wait days and even weeks on average before they can access sorely needed treatment. Insurers, providers, state and county governments must work together with RCOs to ensure immediate access to treatment becomes the norm rather than the exception, on par with access for all other medical conditions. Anyone in need must have 24/7 access to detox, treatment and recovery support services. We also support a permanent and *comprehensive* addiction wraparound services program. We urge a rapid expansion of proactive interventions to assist those in crisis after opiate overdose reversal. Typically no treatment or recovery referral happens and there are numerous reports of additional overdoses and death. Assessment, treatment referrals and *warm handoffs* to recovery support services must be made immediately available to help save lives. Critical intervention points must include (but not limited to) emergency rooms, emergency medical response points, law enforcement encounters and with RCO's.

**Expand the role of peers for individuals and families** - We support increased education and training to help peers access needed certifications and the expansion of employment opportunities for recovery coaches, peer advocates and family navigators in all phases of the recovery continuum including: crisis centers, detox units, inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, community residences, recovery centers, supportive housing, hospitals/emergency rooms, probation, parole, emergency housing (shelters), diversion courts, and attached to recovery community organizations and at other recovery access points. Peers should have lived experience and be in sustained recovery in order to become certified.

**Transportation** - Individuals in early recovery are frequently without a reliable mode of travel or transport that is essential to sustaining recovery. We support the creation of a transportation work group and a funded pilot project to address this concern in a high priority area to be identified by recovery stakeholders.

**Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and Harm Reduction (HR) as chosen pathways to recovery** - We support multiple pathways to recovery, including MAT where therapeutic support is recommended but not mandated.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Recent evidence suggests that when individuals are treated as a resource in their recovery choices they connect with

Rapid MAT access and linkage to peers should be the goal. There is overwhelming evidence that abstinence-based recovery is not effective for a significant percentage of those affected and that MAT is the standard of care for Opioid Use Disorders.

**Improve outcomes for those in treatment and recovery with a history of criminal justice involvement -**

We support the removal of barriers that make it difficult for individuals with criminal records to access treatment, sustain recovery and access fair housing, employment, healthcare, and education. Additionally, we support providing those leaving the criminal justice system or mandatory rehabilitation with MAT whenever needed in order to maximize sustained recovery outcomes and prevent overdose upon re-entry in the community.

**Trauma informed recovery services and evidence based treatment -** Recovery studies and programs should continue to look at trauma as an addiction risk indicator. Related care for those in treatment and recovery should be trauma informed. We must insist that treatment is Evidence Based to ensure that all those seeking and accessing services are able to maximize their chances of effecting positive change and finding long term recovery.

**INSURANCE PARITY ENFORCED WITH EXPANDED ACCESS TO ADDICTION TREATMENT**

**We urge the Governor and NYS Legislature to continue working to enforce parity laws in New York,** and hold insurance companies accountable- Insurers must allow unfettered access to at least 14 days of inpatient treatment and we must continue to educate the public about injustices that exist in their coverages at present.

**JUSTICE FOR LOST LOVED ONES**

**Support lawsuits holding opioid companies accountable -** Demand that revenue generated by lawsuits and other compensation considerations is earmarked specifically to support prevention, treatment and recovery.

**Family harm/Loss register -** Family members nationwide are working to find a way for people to list any legal action they are taking against insurance companies. A coordinated "register" would facilitate communication between plaintiffs, help identify common ground and perhaps similar grievances against insurers, who continue to dodge, deny, and delay. This initiative may very well encourage other affected families to come forward as well.

**Asset forfeiture funds -** We recommend that all asset forfeiture money in the Chemical Dependence Service Fund (Section 97-W/State Finance Law) be allocated to OASAS and invested in the expansion of prevention, treatment, and recovery services. These funds should be dedicated solely for their intended purposes as described.

**EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGNS/ENDING NEGATIVE PUBLIC PERCEPTION**

**Hope in recovery campaign -** Invest resources in a campaign to educate the public about the power and promise of recovery. Education is the key to ending negative public perception. Highlight lived experience and long-term recovery.

Continue to eliminate pejorative language and transform to align with a modern, compassionate, healthcare

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supports that yield sustainable recovery. (see <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/m/pubmed/16870915/>)



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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