



Families Together in New York State 2019 Joint Mental Hygiene Testimony

Families Together in New York State is a family-run organization that represents families of children with social, emotional, behavioral health and cross-systems challenges. Our goal is to ensure that *ALL* children and youth have the support they need in order to succeed. We represent thousands of families from across the state whose children have been involved in many systems including mental health, substance abuse, special education, juvenile justice, and foster care. Our board and staff are made up primarily of family members and youth who have been involved in these systems.

Families Together 2019 Policy Agenda is created by families of children and youth with social, emotional, behavioral and cross-systems challenges.

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”
-Frederick Douglass

CHILDREN’S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

GOAL: All children, youth and their families, regardless of insurance status, must have timely, affordable access to appropriate children’s behavioral health services within their community.

To address the capacity crisis, Families Together in New York State supports the following:

- **PRIORITY:** Expand and integrate Family Peer Support and Youth Peer Support Services into all children’s services.
- **PRIORITY:** Maintain and Expand program code 1650 state-aid funding for Family Peer Support.
- **PRIORITY:** Additional funding for the transition to Children and Family Treatment and Support (CFTS) services and State waiver programs to Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Array, including extension of enhanced rates for those services.
- **PRIORITY:** Offer the new CFTS services to the 386,807 children under Child Health Plus .
- **PRIORITY:** Provide a 2.9 % Cost of Living Adjustments for human services workers.
- **Expand service capacity for community-based prevention, treatment and recovery-orientated addiction programming**, including the establishment of new Youth Clubhouses, Family Support Navigator Programs, and public education campaigns.
- **Additional funds for mental health in schools** including wrap-around, violence and bullying prevention and school climate improvements, including funding for the School Mental Health Technical Assistance Center to support mental health curriculum in schools.
- **Ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing** for young people in transition, including integrated supportive housing.
- **Ensure that trauma informed care is practiced in behavioral health system.**

GOAL: Make New York behavioral health insurance parity laws the strongest in the country.

Families Together in New York State supports the following:

- **PRIORITY:** Codify protections for pre-existing conditions, and the essential health benefits mandates included in the Affordable Care Act and create a Universal Access Commission.
- **PRIORITY:** Additional resources to hire staff within the Department of Financial Services to monitor commercial plans and the Department of Health for surveillance, monitoring and parity enforcement activities related to Medicaid.
- **Set Substance Use Disorder and Mental Health treatment co-payments equal** to those for a doctor's office.
- **Give OMH control over the medical necessity criteria** used for mental health treatment.
- **Allow for immediate access to mental health inpatient treatment** for children under age 18 by eliminating prior authorization.
- **Authorize 21 days of SUD treatment to begin** and continue without insurer interference
- **Require mental health utilization review staff to have appropriate expertise.**
- **Prohibit insurers and health plans from retaliating against providers** who file reports regarding violations of the insurance law with State agencies.
- **Require insurers and health plans to post additional information regarding their in-network providers of MH/SUD**, including whether provider is accepting new patients and their affiliations with participating facilities certified or authorized by OMH or OASAS.

PROVIDE QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

GOAL: Ensure that schools are safe and supportive environments for all students:

- **PRIORITY:** Continue providing funding for the Mental Health in Schools Technical Assistance Center, expand educational programming for students and their families on behavioral health, trauma, resiliency-based skills, and wellness, and bolster school-based children's behavioral health capacity.
- **PRIORITY:** Providing funding for training for schools in the use of restorative justice and other alternative disciplinary approaches to reduce suspensions.
- **PRIORITY:** Pass the Safe and Supportive School Act to ban the suspension of students from kindergarten through third grade, prohibit suspensions for minor infractions, and limit long-term suspensions to 20 days, down from 180. The bill also urges alternatives to suspensions and would require schools to create a code of conduct for students, employees and visitors "that promote a safe and supportive learning environment."
- Require the Board of Regents to provide multiple pathways to a diploma beyond passing five regents exams and simplify graduation options.
- Increasing support for transitions from settings such as the juvenile justice placement, inpatient mental health and substance use, residential treatment centers, and other situations that disrupt a student's education.
- Improving support for parents and students as they develop their Individualized Education Plans.
- Increasing access to and improve the quality of pre-school and kindergarten programs.