



# *New York State Catholic Conference*

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Testimony  
of the  
New York State Catholic Conference  
regarding the  
2019 – 2020  
Mental Hygiene Budget

Submitted by:  
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Legislative Office Building  
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Senator Krueger, Assembly Member Weinstein, distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Michael A. Lawler and I am Director of Catholic Charities for the New York State Catholic Conference. I am representing the New York State Council of Catholic Charities Directors, the policy board for Catholic Charities and its programs operating in all 62 counties of this state. I am also on the Advisory Board of the Strong Nonprofits for a Better New York campaign. We are a group of nearly 400 human services agencies from every region of the state that has come together to work on human service workforce needs. Catholic Charities is also a large provider of substance use disorder prevention and treatment services; a provider of mental health services in many communities and in our schools; and we are a provider of health home services to adults and children.

Our top priority over the past three years has been the human services workforce. The human services sector, broadly defined, is in crisis. Recruitment and retention is a serious problem across the board. This is particularly true in the behavioral health sector.

We believe there is one way to begin to address this crisis: fund the statutory 2.9 percent cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) for all human services in this budget.

A decade ago, the human services COLA was put into law. Upon its immediate passage, it was deferred. This pattern has continued year in and year out. To date, the entire human services sector has lost nearly \$700 million in state funding. This budget proposal continues this trend and withholds another \$140 million from the human services sector.

The entire behavioral health community stands together in support of a 2.9% COLA for the human services sector. The not for profits in the behavioral health community are on the front lines every day providing housing, treatment and support to over 1 million New Yorkers. In order to prevent the opioid epidemic, the increase in suicide completions and the increase in homelessness and incarceration, we need the valued support of the behavioral health sector. In addition, more than 80 percent of the human service workforce is comprised of women and more than 40 percent are individuals of color. Many of these individuals are working one or two additional jobs. We urge your support to ensure that there is \$140 million included in this year's budget to help provide the necessary funding to help support New York's not for profits.

I know that each and every one of you reading this testimony believes in the nonprofit sector and the great work we do in your communities. We also know that you support us in our quest to get the COLA.

Thank you for your service to this state and thank you for supporting the entire Human Services sector.