

Hello,

I am a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in NYS since 2008. Over the past 13 years, I've had the opportunity to serve hundreds of youth and families and the non-profit organization, Pathways, Inc. Pathways, Inc. has offices in the Southern Tier, Finger Lakes, and Greater Rochester area. We already have a significant shortage of licensed mental health professionals in our area. Given the pandemic, the mental health consequences for our communities will be long lasting. I am writing to urge you to please approve the newly worded scope of practice and diagnosis definition for Article 163 Practitioners. I was trained to assess, diagnose, and treat clients. Most insurance panels in the State of New York also accept this scope of practice, but our most vulnerable population is being underserved because LMHCs are not able to register as a Medicaid provider that diagnoses youth. The most vulnerable youth in our State, disproportionately black and brown populations will have 10,000 less practitioners than youth on most private insurances. This is not acceptable. We have a mental health epidemic and soon we will have a mental health pandemic in our nation due to the long lasting trauma of the grief and loss from this pandemic. Counselors are needed more than ever. Last year, the Governor vetoed a bill that would remedy this situation indicating financial concerns. I am requesting that the scope of practice/diagnosing issue not only be passed immediately, but that there will be support from the Governor in establishing this into law.

Requested Action:

Mental health provider associations, providers and clinical practice associations have developed a solution that does not include another exemption extension, but instead addresses the discrepancy in the scope of practice descriptions in law. The legislative solution will;

- 1. amend education law, in relation to requirements for licensure of certain mental health practitioners, and,**
- 2. permit those licensed mental health practitioners to render a diagnosis.**

The bill will set forth standards of educational coursework, supervised clinical training and licensure examinations that are equal to those included in the licensed clinical social work law. There will be no discrepancy in the preparation of the various licensed practitioners

The modernization of the scope of practice, removal of outdated statutory references and authorization of a standard set of preparatory activities for licensed practitioners will alleviate workforce challenges at voluntary nonprofit agencies and ease access to care barriers. This is of particular importance giving the ever-rising demand for these services that is in part, due to the COVID pandemic.

We urge the Legislature to advance this workforce training and support initiative to address workforce shortages and mental health access challenges immediately as part of the negotiated budget agreement. We will present the relevant chairs with a petition signed by nearly 500 concerned citizens and licensed mental health practitioners who support this request. Thank you for your time and consideration to this pressing matter.

Best Regards,

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