

Written Testimony for
NYS Budget hearing on Health- Feb 25, 2021

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Thank you for the opportunity to write to you today. I am a patient who was cured of Hepatitis C seven years ago. I facilitated support groups for 18 years at NYU Langone Health and am the founder and executive director of the Hepatitis C Mentor and Support Group, Inc. In addition to being a patient, I have experience working with both patients and providers

At HCMSG we provide education and supportive services for people living with Hepatitis C and co-infected with HIV throughout New York. Educational groups and supportive patient mentoring services have been shown to be important elements of successful and cost effective medical care for patients with hepatitis C and other chronic health conditions. These services improve the quality of life, as well as medical outcomes for patients.

The training HCMSG provides for healthcare providers help them to have a better understanding of how to work with all patients with an emphasis on high risk populations, such as people with substance use disorder, those co infected with HIV, the LGBTQ community, Youth and Women of child bearing age dealing with Hepatitis C.

It is critical for NYS to fully support \$5 million in the Executive budget Hepatitis C Elimination funding. I serve on the New York State Hepatitis C Elimination task force, and hope to see us provide the model for the entire country, with NY State to eliminate Hepatitis C. We need increased services for viral hepatitis, peer navigators, harm reduction and syringe exchange services.

We must protect Medicaid and Article 6 and oppose the Executive budget proposal to cut Article 6 public health matching funds to NYC from 20% to 10%, lives are on the line!

We oppose the Executive Budget proposal for Medicaid Pharmacy Carve Out and 340B fund, and support reversal of the pharmacy carve out, or exemption for HIV special needs plans and 340B providers, and support Assembly Member Gottfried / Senator Rivera bill S.2520/A.1671, which would delay the Medicaid pharmacy benefit carve- out for HIV special needs health plans and 340B covered entities (including community health centers like the four that Housing Works

operates, Ryan White HIV clinics, sexual health clinics, and other critical safety-net providers) for three years.

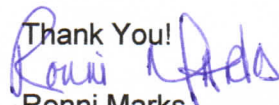
We oppose the Executive budget proposal for 5% withhold on State contracts with nonprofits, emphasizing that if the NYC receives Federal stimulus funding, all funding withheld from nonprofit contracts should be restored

More education is needed in overdose prevention, Viral Hepatitis and HIV. People need to understand the syndemic connection between substance use and infectious disease.

As a patient who has been cured from hepatitis C and one who works with patients, I can tell you firsthand what an impact this virus has on someone. It effects the whole body, not just the liver. Being cured has been the key to having people turn their lives around.

There is such power in having supportive services and patient navigators. It is essential for patients to work with people who understand what they are going through and can help them get through the process, making it easier for patients to adhere to treatment. In many cases it has helped to reduce the feeling of stigma associated with having hepatitis and co infection with HIV.

Please help us ensure that all New York State residents have access to Hepatitis C testing, treatment and care regardless of race, gender, or economic status.

Thank You!

Ronni Marks