

Oral Comments of

**The New York Association of School
Psychologists**

on the

The NYS Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2023

Good afternoon. My name is Beth Rizzi and I am the President of the New York Association of School Psychologists. I want to thank the Chair and all the panel members for this opportunity to share comments on the Governor's Executive Budget.

I share these comments under the backdrop of the national crisis that currently exists related to children's mental health. We are well aware of the impact that these past two years have had on the social and emotional adjustment of children and adolescents. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association have declared a national emergency in children's mental health, citing the serious toll of the pandemic and other social justice factors within our nation. The U.S. Surgeon General issued a new Advisory to highlight the urgent need to address the nation's youth mental health crisis. And we all applaud the Governor's own recognition of the mental health crisis in her State of the State address a couple of weeks ago. On a personal level, I can tell you that our children are hurting. I see many of the children in my school struggling with increased anxiety, heightened levels of depression, and general difficulties managing the challenges of school and life.

However, there are ways for you as legislators to support our children and make a difference in the mental health supports available to youth and families.

Senator Brouk and Assembly Member Rosenthal have sponsored legislation (S4347A/A545A) that would provide for the licensure of school psychologists. Currently, without this licensure, school psychologists are limited to working within school districts and some state agencies. However, there is a severe shortage of mental health professionals in the community and families are faced with long wait-lists, extensive travel, and unfortunately a reliance upon emergency room services at hospitals to access needed services. Licensure of school psychologists would increase the mental health workforce throughout New York State and strengthen our mental health system

by increasing access to vital services needed by thousands of our children and families. The bill passed the Senate unanimously last session and we urge both houses to take this bill up immediately and move it forward to help children.

Additionally, there are a number of proposals within the Governor's budget that would help to address the mental health needs of children. I will highlight a few here, but will provide greater detail in my written remarks.

We are pleased to see and support the proposal for \$10 million in mental health support grants for school districts. While federal grant funding over the past two years has been helpful to increase programs and supports, the reality is that ongoing funding is required to sustain and expand these interventions to address the devastating impact of the pandemic on children's mental health.

Unfortunately, we recognize that high needs districts have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and do not have the resources to address their students' needs. Therefore, we support the Executive proposal for \$100 million to establish a matching fund- the Recover from COVID school program (RECOVS). This will benefit high needs districts that use their federal relief dollars to expand summer programming or after school and extended day programs, as well as hire mental health professionals, expand mental health services, and other evidence based mental health supports. We would recommend that districts be required to account for or report to SED and their communities on the process by which the spending decisions were made to assure prioritization of mental health needs.

Finally, we would support the \$1.5 million which is proposed to support expenses related to mental health programs in schools, \$500,000 of which is dedicated to support the school mental health technical assistance center.

Thank you again and I would welcome any questions from members of the panel.