

**February 14, 2022**

**Testimony of  
The New York State Office of Mental Health  
to the New York State Assembly  
and Senate Fiscal Committees**



**Office of  
Mental Health**

Good morning, I am Dr. Ann Sullivan, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH). Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Brouk, Gunther, and members of the respective committees, I want to thank you for the invitation to address OMH's 2022-23 Budget.

As we all know, the last two years of the Covid Pandemic have presented unprecedented challenges to the mental health of individuals and families across our state.

The Mission of the New York State Office of Mental Health is to promote the mental health of **all New Yorkers**, with a particular focus on providing hope and recovery for adults with serious mental illness and children with serious emotional disturbances.

With an estimated 40 to 50 percent of New Yorkers having a significant mental health impact from this pandemic, there is an increased need for timely and effective services that reach equally to all our communities. The pandemic has also alerted us to the increased need for mental health prevention and wellness, and the need to address any hesitancy about asking for help when needed.

Governor Hochul's Executive Budget this year provides an exceptional opportunity to build the mental health infrastructure needed to better support New Yorkers by proposing a historic \$577 million increase to the mental health budget.

### **Workforce investments**

From the very beginning of the pandemic, our mental health care workers have been on the front lines. The pandemic has dramatically exacerbated concerns related to recruiting and retaining essential workers. The Governor's budget recognizes that we must address the current hemorrhaging of our workforce, by not just saying that we owe them a debt of gratitude, but by actually paying the debt we owe them. **This year's Executive Budget includes a historic 5.4 % Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for community mental health providers licensed, designated and/or funded by OMH.** The Governor's Budget also includes legislation authorizing **retention bonuses up to \$3,000 for full-time essential front-line workers.** Additionally, the Budget includes resources for the statutory minimum wage increases. These much-needed investments will help rebuild and grow the workforce, improve the career pipeline, and expand access to services.

### **Helping vulnerable New Yorkers**

We know that despite the resources that we develop in the community, there are individuals who are not able to access those services without a great deal of support. The Governor has launched the **Safe Options Support (SOS) initiative to assist individuals living with serious mental illness who are homeless.** Beginning with individuals living in the subways of New York City, the Budget includes **\$11.3 million in 2022-23 to develop 20 new SOS teams with a multi-disciplinary team of 12 staff to reach thousands of homeless individuals using an evidence-based Critical-Time-Intervention (CTI) model.** This investment in support services combined with a two-year plan to provide for additional stabilization investments in community residential programs provides for a comprehensive approach to housing the homeless.

### **Increased mental health needs for youth and families**

The pandemic has had a particular impact on the mental health of young people across the nation. In New York, between March and July 2020, it is estimated tragically that 4,200 children lost a parent or caregiver to COVID-19, and early estimates show that there have been more than 6,600 deaths by suicide nationally in children and young adults during 2020. This year's budget has several initiatives to address the mental health crisis among youth and families, including \$10 million to fund the expansion of the **Home-Based Crisis Intervention (HBCI)** program. HBCI provides short-term, intensive, in-home intervention services to a family in crisis as an alternative to admitting their child into a psychiatric hospital. This expansion will enable HBCI programs to serve more than 2,600 families each year, doubling the current volume.

Addressing the trauma caused by the pandemic in school-aged children is a priority. The Governor's Budget includes **\$10 million in new resources to invest in school-based mental health to provide statewide learning and mental health grants to high-need school districts including additional funding to expand access to mental health services in schools.** The funding will support the hiring of mental health professionals, expansion of the almost 1,000 school-based mental health clinics, particularly in the most impacted communities, and other evidence-based mental health supports for students and school staff. The budget also includes resources to expand the NYS Trauma-Informed Network throughout the child serving system to recognize and address the range of experiences that may be trauma-inducing for young children and their families, especially since the start of pandemic.

And for those youth and families that need intensive brief residential supports, there is increased funding to support our residential treatment facilities and advance the most innovative best practices.

### **988 implementation and crisis system development**

OMH has been working diligently in collaboration with the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) and stakeholders on the implementation of the 988 three-digit behavioral health hotline as a single point of entry for the behavioral health crisis system to begin in July. This year's budget includes **\$35 million for FY 2023 and grows to \$60 million in FY 2024 in new resources for the expansion of call center capacity for 988 which builds on an existing \$17 million in federal grants currently underway for the necessary start-up resources to build that capacity and expand functionality to include 24/7 call, text, and chat capacity across the state** as well as support linkages to New York's community-based crisis system. To better serve New Yorkers, the crisis continuum includes expanded mobile crisis services, the development of crisis stabilization centers, and crisis residential programs.

### **Housing and community-based services**

The Governor's Budget includes **\$65 million in new resources in 2022-23 and an additional \$39 million in 2023-24 as part of a two-year plan for investments in supported housing, single room occupancy and community residence programs.** The Budget includes **\$36 million for full support for the residential pipeline, including almost**

**1,700 new beds.** The local capital budget includes \$60 million in new capital funding to address maintenance, repairs, and preservation projects for existing community beds. To support the expansion of community care and crisis services, the 2022-23 Executive Budget annualizes another **\$22 million for Community Mental Health Reinvestment.**

Additionally, the increased need for mental health services caused by the pandemic is addressed by enhanced clinic rates and additional resources designed to improve access to care. The Executive Budget also includes appropriations for the full reinvestment of **\$74 million State share in projected recoveries** which represent OMH's share of the reinvestment of Managed Care savings recovered from Managed Care Organizations.

### **Focusing on wellness and Peer Support**

OMH will be providing new resources to expand the integration of mental health services into primary care settings through the **HealthySteps program**, an evidence-based prevention program which improves health and behavioral health outcomes. To expand capacity, OMH and DOH will also partner to provide Medicaid reimbursement for dyadic services offering support for parent and child at the same time in these programs, and licensed behavioral health professionals will be fully integrated into pediatric primary care well-child visits.

Building on the success of the crisis counseling services provided by New York Project Hope, this year's budget includes **\$2.5 million in new resources to pilot a mental health wellness program designed to equip a community-based workforce of lay personnel trained in mental health to focus on wellness.** We also know that helping individuals to become employed increases wellness and is at the heart of rehabilitation and recovery. This year, \$2.5 million in new resources has been budgeted to improve employment opportunities through the expansion of psychiatric rehabilitation services and the enhancement of the New York Employment Services System (NYESS) – a unique partnership between OMH and the Department of Labor (DOL) - which is at the forefront of Employment First related initiatives.

Importantly, the Governor's Budget also includes **\$7.7 million in funding for statewide coverage for the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Services Program** that provides peer-to-peer support to veterans.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to report on our efforts to address historic needs in response to a pandemic and to support and continue the work that we have jointly embarked upon to transform New York's mental health system. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.