

Testimony of

Evelyn Graham Nyaasi

on behalf of

Correct Crisis Intervention Today – NYC

before

The Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene

February 14, 2022

I would like to thank the Legislature for allowing me the opportunity to speak at this budget hearing.

I was sitting on my sofa four years ago when there was a knock at my door and when I opened the door, there were 8-9 police officers in the hallway. They told me that someone from my home had called 911 and said that I had a knife! An officer told me I had to go with him. I was afraid of police officers, and I knew what they could do to me, so I grabbed my coat and medication.

I was escorted outside, and the officer asked me if I wanted to go in the police car or ambulance. I chose the ambulance because I did not want to go to jail. I was taken to Bellevue hospital and dropped off. They put me in a locked room, where people were screaming and yelling. We were locked up like animals. I asked for my high blood pressure medication, but I was ignored and sent back to my seat. I was taken to the hospital on the Friday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's birthday weekend, so nothing would be done until the following Tuesday. I was angry that I was lied on. Angry that I was taken to Bellevue hospital and angry that I was stuck there until Tuesday!

I was not released until 2 weeks later.

I was traumatized because I was in an environment that I did not belong in and when I finally left the hospital, I had nightmares about being locked up and had to build back up my trust to see psychiatrists, therapists, and some of my family members. I did nothing wrong, and I did not have a knife. It's also scary to see so many people coming for one person.

Today, when I see a group of police officers, it reminds me of the traumatizing experience I had that night, which triggers memories of other traumatic events that occurred in my life. I can only imagine what it feels like for

homeless people with mental challenges. Like them, I was not given a choice. I was just taken to the hospital and dropped off.

Kendra's Law

CCITNYC opposes the extension of Kendra's Law because no one should be forced to do anything. Especially when people with mental health challenges were failed by the mental health system and others. Even worse, most of the people who are under forced treatment orders are minorities, which is a form of systemic racism that violates our legal rights and basic standards of medical care.

Kendra's Law should be replaced or changed to operate like a successful program in New York City, called Intensive Mobile Treatment, that assigns high-need individuals to teams of trained peers and clinicians. The case loads are quite small, and the teams can develop service plans and supports tailored to each person. Since 2016, 91% of IMT clients (nearly all of whom had been homeless and incarcerated) have continued to receive services for a year or more and over half have been placed in housing.

People with mental challenges should not be forced to go to the hospital only to be released back into street without having their needs met or dragged through a legal system that does not take their situation into account.

Programs that effectively engage people, like IMT, need to be supported with investments in supportive housing, crisis stabilization centers, peer-run crisis respites and clubhouses.

9-8-8 suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline system

CCITNYC would like to thank Governor Hochul and the New York State Legislature for enacting the 9-8-8 mental health crisis hotline law. It's now critical that adequate follow-up services are funded, so people calling 9-8-8 can be connected to supports no matter where they live in the state.

For people experiencing an immediate crisis, CCIT-NYC advocates for a non-police response to mental health crisis calls. These community response teams should include a trained peer and an Emergency Medical Technician. Police are not trained properly on how to de-escalate a situation, nor are they a doctor or therapist.

A person experiencing a mental health crisis doesn't need to be treated like a criminal. They need to be treated with dignity, compassion & respect.

Daniel's Law - Assembly Bill A4697

CCITNYC would also like the Legislature to pass Daniel's Law, which calls for a non-police response to mental health crisis calls and the creation of regional crisis response planning councils that include peer members.