



1529 Western Avenue  
Albany, New York 12203  
518-487-4395  
www.FOR-NY.ORG

**“Nothing About Us,  
Without Us”**

**Testimony of Friends of Recovery New York (FOR-NY)  
*Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2022 Executive Budget Proposal:  
Topic Mental Hygiene***

**Presented by:**

**Angelia Smith-Wilson EdD, MSW  
Executive Director  
Friends of Recovery New York  
(FOR-NY)**

## **Introduction:**

I am Dr. Angelia Smith-Wilson, and as the Executive Director of Friends of Recovery - New York and a family member and ally to the recovery movement, I am honored to be invited by the Chairs of the Senate Finance Committee Liz Krueger and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee Helene Weinstein to testify today. I would also like to share gratitude for the support from the Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Senate Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Chair Pete Harckham, Senate Mental Health Chair Sandra Brouk and Chair of the Committee on Disabilities John Mannion, as well as Speaker Carl Heastie, the Assembly Chair of the Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Committee Phil Steck, Chairwoman of Mental Health Aileen Gunther and Chair of the Committee on Disabilities Thomas Abinanti.

## **About FOR-NY:**

Friends of Recovery-New York represents the voice of individuals and families living in recovery from addiction, families who have lost a family member or people who have been otherwise impacted by addiction. The negative public perception and shame that surrounds addiction has prevented millions of individuals and family members from seeking help. FOR-NY is dedicated to breaking down the barriers created by negative public perception that result in discrimination and policies that block or interfere with accessing recovery support services: access to addiction treatment, healthcare; housing, education and employment.

FOR-NY also works to build an infrastructure around the state through local Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) that build supports for people living in recovery and others in need. Our network of RCOs are strongly in support of life saving, evidence-based practices to support people seeking recovery.

## **Community Needs**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 93,000 lives were lost to addiction in 2020. Through recovery community surveys, we have learned (not by surprise) that the recovery community has struggled in connection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Connection with other individuals with lived experience is crucial to sustaining recovery. When programs are unavailable, connections can be lost. We commend the recovery community for stepping up during the pandemic and continuing to offer life saving services and innovative ways to continue to connect with one another.

Additionally in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the recovery community has come together with lawmakers to advocate for and pass critical legislation, including the Opioid Settlement Fund. As strategically included in this legislation, it is crucial that **people in recovery are at the table in responding to this public health crisis** in all the decisions being made and choosing where to allocate funding.

In October 2021, we conducted our annual recovery community point in time policy survey, gathering the voices of our community and identifying top needs. Based on these results and in response to the proposed FY 2022-23 NYS Budget, our policy statement is as follows:

**Racial Justice:** FOR-NY recognizes the long-standing racial inequities affecting Black and Latinx communities<sup>1</sup> and strongly support the creation of the new Office of Health Equity to be established within the Department of

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<sup>1</sup> For Black and Latinx groups in the US, 90% and 92%, respectively, diagnosed with a SUD did not receive addiction treatment. Another study showed that Black patients were 70% less likely to receive a prescription for buprenorphine at their visit when controlling for payment method, sex, and age. Furthermore,

Health to address health equity among “underserved populations.” We emphasize that health should include addiction services and supports and the office should consider understanding and acting upon racial inequities to be paramount.

**Housing:** FOR-NY supports [S.1416/A.8165](#) which authorizes certification of recovery living residences and allows certified recovery residences to be listed on the OASAS website. FOR-NY is pleased to see the creation of a recovery housing certification process included in the 2022-23 Executive Budget. The voices of recovery housing operators and people with lived experience must be included, as the conversation develops statewide surrounding this important aspect of the continuum of care for SUD.

**Treatment on Demand** We support treatment on demand including harm reduction with recovery wrap around services and equitable access. We support the Governor’s proposals for Mobile Crisis Units and the creation of a Harm Reduction Division at OASAS. We also support the following bills:

- [A.8502 \(Mental Health Integration\)](#); and [A.8503/S.7650 \(Physical health integration\)](#) which further the goal of treating the whole person.
- [S.2881B/A.8524](#) the “Treatment Not Jails Act” which aims to provide better, more person centered and inclusive care for those with substance use disorder.
- [S.8057](#): Which Expands the scope of the CHAMP program to include representation for other agencies whose populations are impacted; and
- [S.8058](#): Which explicitly adds mental health services, substance use disorder treatment services, including but not limited to opioid treatment programs and medication assisted treatment options, and recovery support services to those included in the network of health maintenance organizations.

**Recovery Oriented Systems of Care:** We strongly advocated for legislation [S.7194](#) (signed into law last session) ensuring all future opioid litigation funds are supplemental to current funding and that the recovery community has a voice in distribution of funds. These funds have the potential to fill the gap in recovery-oriented systems of care (including Recovery Community Organizations, Youth Clubhouses, Recovery Centers, Certified Peers and Family Navigators) around the state (43 Million Needed). We support the use of Opioid Settlement Funds and Opioid Tax funds for new programs or expanded resources which increase access to recovery-oriented systems of care.

**Transportation:** We strongly supported [S.1417](#) establishing an addiction recovery supportive transportation services demonstration program which was passed in the 2021-22 Budget however, we are awaiting information on funding of the program and status of the legislation and hope to see expansion. We also support [S.7910](#) which relates to reimbursement rates for peers and transportation services.

We are also urging the Governor to expand access to all forms of naloxone.

Addiction recovery is not just an individual or even a family issue or illness, it is a community issue. While recovery addresses many areas of concern as indicated in our survey, the top five issues that are most important to our community were identified as Racial Justice; Housing; Treatment; Recovery Oriented Systems of Care and Transportation.

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a study of privately insured people who suffered an overdose and were treated at an emergency room found that Black patients were half as likely to obtain treatment following overdose compared with non-Hispanic white patients. Studies have also shown that despite uniform rates of substance use among racial and ethnic populations, there is a disproportionate rate of drug arrests for Black Americans. For example, cannabis use is equally prevalent among Black and white people, yet Black people are 3.64 times as likely to be arrested for possession. The inequities in substance use treatment are multifactorial, but racism is a common thread throughout. <https://medicine.yale.edu/news-article/racial-inequities-in-treatments-of-addictive-disorders/>

In our work experience- COVID-19 has made everyone become more familiar with virtual platforms. *Those with access* may turn on a computer or dial a phone number and be connected instantly. But even with that access, as the overdose numbers show, we are missing people. We believe the funding coming from the federal government, the opioid settlement dollars and the opioid tax income have the potential to save lives. The priority issues presented from our survey indicates top needs to fill gaps as identified by the recovery community. We thank you for listening to our voice as you continue to make decisions on behalf of our community.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and to the people you serve.

**Recovery Services Offered and Needs Table**

This table represents what is needed in New York State to ensure all communities, statewide have access to recovery-oriented systems of care.

Program	How Many Counties are funded	How Many Counties Need this?		Cost for community investment	Investment Needed
Recovery Community Organization	Only one is funded (LIRA)	61		\$150,000	\$9,150,000
Recovery Community Outreach Center	24	38	62	<a href="#">\$350,000</a>	\$13,300,000
Recovery Youth Clubhouse	20	42	62	<a href="#">\$250,000</a>	\$10,500,000
Peer Engagement Specialist (2 per county)	37	25	62	<a href="#">\$150,000</a>	\$3,750,000
Family Support Navigators (2 per county)	39	23	62	<a href="#">\$100,000</a>	\$2,300,000
<b>Total Funding Needed</b>					<b>\$39,000,000</b>