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Written Testimony of Dennis Short, Senior Policy Analyst, 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene February 14, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the proposed Mental Hygiene budget on behalf of the 300,000 New York State members of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East.

1199SEIU members are front-line case managers, service coordinators, social workers, resident counselors, and other positions working for community-based organizations across the state. As we consider the next Mental Hygiene budget, it is important to remember that the frontline caregivers are critical to both the quality and access to high quality mental healthcare and we must address the structural issues that contribute to low wages and staff exodus.

The workforce is underpaid and overworked, and increasingly leaving for jobs that pay more with less stress. Often staff with bachelors and master's degrees are earning \$30K to \$40 per year for very challenging work.

We support many of the workforce initiatives in the Executive Budget including:

- 5.4% COLA for Human Service Workers
- \$100 million for Behavioral Health Crisis Stabilization Centers
- \$265.9M from Opioid Settlement in OASAS budget and includes \$200M for services & expenses for public health mitigation strategy for opioid addictions
- Proposal to provide Healthcare Workforce bonuses to Health and Mental Hygiene employees, though the Executive's proposal excludes key members of the care team, including those who clean patients' rooms, transport them within the hospital, and deliver their food. The entire care team should be included in the bonus proposal.

The workforce challenges facing mental and behavioral health services is already severe and getting worse as staff continue to vote with their feet and search for opportunities that can better support their families. The proposed budget is a good first step and a down payment on the investments we need to make in this workforce. However, it is just a down payment, and we need to continue to increase funding for the agencies that support these services.

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