



New York State Catholic Conference

THE OFFICIAL PUBLIC POLICY VOICE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE EMPIRE STATE

DENNIS POUST, *EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR*

Testimony
of the
New York State Catholic Conference
regarding the
2022 – 2023
Mental Hygiene Budget

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Introduction

Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for mental health and addiction-related services has increased exponentially, making the state's increased investment in the Mental Hygiene budget ever more critical. The number of New Yorkers reporting anxiety, depression, and other struggles has ballooned to top 40%. Tragically, there has been a 51% rise in suicide attempts among young girls. A third of high schoolers report persistent hopelessness or sadness. Deaths due to drug overdose have increased 38%.

Organizations like Catholic Charities serve many of the populations affected by the mental health and addiction crises. These organizations are desperate for investment from the State to meet rising needs exacerbated by the pandemic. Without increases, many New Yorkers will struggle in the absence of care.

Without adequate funding, the organizations that are doing this most critical work will not be able to meet demand. It is our hope that this year's budget will address these areas of most urgent need:

Behavioral Health Workforce Attraction and Retention

We are so grateful to the Governor for including a 5.4% COLA for behavioral health workers in her budget proposal, and we ask that you advance the measure. The commitment to grow the community healthcare workforce through increased benefits is an important one, and critical to staffing important programs. The services for mental health and addiction need skilled and qualified workers at every level. A COLA is long overdue and an important part of retaining them.

The Governor has proposed an additional \$40.7 million to support the minimum wage increases among mental health and addiction staff at not-for-profits. This is another key component of retaining qualified staff. We ask that you retain this funding in the enacted budget so that Catholic Charities and other providers may continue supporting communities in need.

Support for Community Mental Health and Addiction Services

The most impactful service for people suffering from mental illness or addiction happens at the community level. We are grateful to the Governor for proposing \$111 million for OMH and OASAS to fund rate increases for community-based services, supports, clinics, and other mental health and addiction services. Catholic Charities plays a vital role serving these groups within communities and we recognize the crises brought on by the pandemic. We urge you to support this funding.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering our testimony. Catholic social teaching reminds us to seek out the most vulnerable among us and to lift them up. During this most urgent time of need, we pray that you keep these populations in mind.