

TESTIMONY OF
Drena Fagen, LCSW-R, LCAT
Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Licensed Creative Arts Therapist
On behalf of the profession of Licensed Creative Arts Therapists (LCAT)

2023 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing

Thank you to the Chairs of the Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee and other Legislative Leaders for the opportunity to present today regarding the 2024 New York State Executive Budget

My name is Drena Fagen and I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Licensed Creative Arts Therapist and the co-owner and Director of a private licensed creative arts therapist practice that has been providing mental health services to New Yorkers for over 16 years in Brooklyn and the Hudson Valley. I and my team of 20 therapists are so grateful for this bill and the efforts by the Governor and Legislature to close the provider gap and expand services during this relentless mental health crisis. There is one provision in the bill, however, that we are concerned about.

Notably absent from Part Q amending “the social services law, in relation to establishing Medicaid reimbursement for community health workers” is the *entire* profession of nearly 2,000 Licensed Creative Arts Therapists (LCAT). Only two of the four mental health practitioner licenses (LMHC and LMFT) are covered by this bill.

Creative arts therapists are often the first responders after tragic events like mass violence and natural disasters, working with young children exposed to violence and abuse, and with youth and adults, including veterans who have PTSD. After 9/11, art therapists were activated to provide immediate support to survivors and their services were covered by Cigna insurance. After the Newtown Elementary school shooting, creative arts therapists deployed a team of skilled clinicians to support the children, families and witnesses of this unspeakable violence.

LCATs have specialized skills and training in providing psychotherapy to those who are not effectively served by talk therapy methods. This includes people from different cultures, non-English speakers, BIPOC, and LGBTQI+ communities.

In February 2023 the LCAT Advocacy Coalition surveyed 556 LCATs working across New York State:

88% (n=494) work with clients in the LGBTQIA+ community

27% (n=150) work with refugees

65.3% (n=363) work with immigrants

49.1% (n=273) work with non-English speakers

91.9% (n=511) work with clients who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person of Color)

I would like to read a few email inquiries our practice has received in the past four months (the names have been changed to protect privacy)

Dec 2, 2022

I'm a foster mother to a 4-year-old girl and based in Greenpoint.. We have been trying to get her into therapy for months, and her law advocate just recommended that we reach out to you and thinks she would be a great candidate for services at NY Creative Arts Therapists as she's going through a difficult time. She is on MetroPlus medicaid, and I am hoping you're able to accept this - or perhaps provide a prorated rate for a child in foster care? There are no other options anywhere in the area that I can find.

Nov 2022

My name is Abby, I am a Clinician and Advocate with STEPS to End Family Violence, Criminalized Survivors Program. and the Manhattan and Brooklyn Family Justice Centers. I have a client whose child has been impacted by exposure to trauma. He is five years old and would greatly benefit from Art Therapy intervention. I was wondering if your organization is currently accepting new clients.

FJC Clinical Advocate, STEPS Criminalized Survivors Program, Rising Ground Inc

Nov 2022

I am a child life specialist at NewYork-Presbyterian Queens. I was contacted by the mother of a former patient who's trying to find art therapy services. This child experienced a very traumatic loss and, according to his mom, could use some support Dept of Pediatrics, NY Presbyterian Queens

As this small sampling of email inquiries demonstrates, folks are desperate for mental health care and struggling to find it. Case planners, social workers, and discharge planners are out of options for Medicaid dependent and Child Health plus referrals for clients who would benefit from Creative Arts Therapies.

Excluding an entire, ready-for-action, licensed profession of 1,939 qualified therapists undermines the state's ability to solve the current crisis. Please add my creative arts therapy colleagues to this very important bill before New Yorker's mental health needs get even worse! LCATs are available to close the provider gap and help people get the services that they need and want.

Thank you.