



Testimony submitted to the members of the Joint Legislative Budget Committee

**February 27, 2023**

Re: SFY 2023-2024 Executive Budget Proposals

**Topic: Higher Education**

Good morning. My name is Lauri Cole. I am the Executive Director of the NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. The NYS Council represents 126 community-based organizations that provide a broad range of mental health and substance use/addiction prevention, treatment, recovery and harm reduction programs and services, along with an increasing amount of primary care for New Yorkers with mental health and substance use disorder conditions. NYS Council members are the general hospitals, departments of mental hygiene, and freestanding not for profit agencies in your districts and local communities that provide critical safety net services to some of New York's most vulnerable individuals.

NYS Council members play an essential role in ensuring access to high quality low-cost care for tens of thousands of New Yorkers with mental health and/or substance use disorder challenges. Unfortunately, at this time, our member agencies face severe workforce shortages at precisely the moment when demand for care through the public mental hygiene system has never been higher. In the face of a raging Opioid Epidemic, increased suicide attempts, and complicated grief and anxiety reactions related to a range of issues impacting children and youth who have lost loved ones due to the COVID-19 epidemic, there are long waiting lists for care across the state. We are unable to recruit and retain qualified staff to fill vacancies in staffing positions up and down the organization, and specifically, we are desperate to increase the number of practitioners who can diagnose those seeking our services. Access to care is in jeopardy across the state and we need your help.

**Given this circumstance, we ask the Committee to consider amending the Article VII HMH Proposal, Part Q to permit recently graduated LMHCs and LMFTs who, through no fault of their own, are now waiting on SED to apply for a 'diagnostic privilege' that recently became a requirement for them in order to be able to perform the task of diagnosis. If an LMHC or LMFT graduated between 2019-2023 they should not have to wait for SED to put a process in place to verify that the practitioner did indeed earn his credential from a school that meets criteria for diagnostic training. By circumnavigating the process for only those recent graduates who we can presume have received the proper training, we can significantly reduce access to**

**care barriers that are crippling our ability to provide on demand care to New Yorkers who are sitting on waiting lists across the state.**

Thank you for this opportunity to weigh in on this matter.