

Good morning/afternoon:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today about Fountain House and the clubhouse model as you consider the New York State budget. My name is Ashley Miles and I'm a pre-law student majoring in social work at Hunter College. I am proud to share that I have a 3.9 GPA and my success now would not be possible without the support of Fountain House.

Fountain House is a national nonprofit that fights to improve health, increase opportunity, and end social and economic isolation for people most affected by mental illness. We serve about 1,500 members across Hell's Kitchen, the Bronx, and Harlem, including myself. Our Clubhouses are member-run, and the therapeutic programming that members participate in allow us to build relationships and autonomy. The choices we make as members aid in our recovery, and the services offered at the Fountain House have meant that I've been able to find housing and employment too.

Research has consistently shown that individuals with SMI who are members of clubhouses experience improved quality of life, reduced hospitalizations, and enhanced self-esteem, and the benefits of the clubhouse model extend beyond individual outcomes. A study by NYU found that Fountain House reduced Medicaid costs by 21% for individuals with high-risk mental health needs. Economic modeling has shown that for every person we serve, we save the government an estimated \$11,000 per person annually, when including costs associated with health, disability, criminal justice, and productivity. If the clubhouse model were expanded to just 5% of the 15 million Americans living with SMI across the US, our nation could save over \$8.5 billion nationwide each year. Clubhouses offer a proven, results-oriented, and highly cost-effective solution for addressing mental health for Americans.

With those successes in mind, I ask the legislature to do three things:

- Provide robust funding, including capital and programmatic funding, for the expansion of existing and new accredited clubhouses to reach more New Yorkers living with mental illness.
- Create a sustainable funding source that rewards accredited clubhouses based on the value they provide to their members and that promotes fidelity to the clubhouse model.
- Protect access to federal benefits by streamlining recertifications and creating strong exemptions for people with mental illness. The passage of H.R.1 has created significant barriers for people like me, including increased paperwork and looming work requirements. These changes risk disrupting care, increasing food insecurity, and undermining recovery.

Lastly, we urge you to maximize investments in voluntary, evidence-based solutions rooted in community care. Please prioritize these proven models before involuntary methods that may

compromise trust. Clubhouses and many other community mental health care models are already a trusted part of the mental health continuum that promote long-term recovery.

With the expanded support for clubhouses, we can have more outcomes like mine and fewer like Jordan Neely. To see our work in person, we invite you to visit us in the Bronx, Harlem, or Manhattan to learn first-hand from our members how clubhouses have aided in our recovery. Thank you for your time and for consideration.