



February 4, 2026

Subject: Joint Budget Hearing - Mental Hygiene

Greetings Legislators, Commissioners, colleagues, and community members:

My name is Emma Fabian, and I am the Executive Director of the New York State Harm Reduction Association, a statewide network of harm reduction providers and advocates serving people who use drugs and people living with substance use disorder.

I'm also a part-time professor at the University at Buffalo's Graduate School of Social Work and a lifelong Buffalo resident, where for more than a decade I oversaw syringe exchange, drop-in services, drug checking, and low-threshold buprenorphine programs.

We are at a critical moment for harm reduction and the entire continuum of care in New York State. While overdose fatalities have decreased or plateaued in some counties, we know that any loss of life to drug-related harms is too many. And importantly, overdose rates are not declining in Black and Brown communities, including in Erie County where I live. Furthermore, opposition from the federal administration threatens our efforts to care for vulnerable community members.

This is why we are urging the state to look to the AIDS Institute and the leadership it has shown for decades in community-based, health equity-driven public health responses.

The AIDS Institute was established within the Department of Health in 1983 in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. At that time, HIV prevalence among people who use drugs in many parts of New York exceeded 50%. Because of AIDS Institute interventions like syringe exchange and other low-barrier drug user health services, people who use drugs now account for less than 1% of new HIV transmissions statewide. That is one of the most successful public health outcomes ever in New York.

Today, the AIDS Institute's Office of Drug User Health oversees syringe services programs, Drug User Health Hubs, naloxone distribution, low-threshold buprenorphine, and more. While many stakeholders think of OASAS when they think about substance use, the AIDS Institute also plays a critical and often overlooked role in serving this population with lifesaving services and connection to ongoing treatment.

We are asking that the AIDS Institute receive a significant share of opioid settlement funds, and that its budget be increased to expand proven interventions:

- **\$9 million** to expand syringe service programs, especially in rural communities
- **\$3 million** for syringe collection and safe disposal

- **\$3 million** to expand drug checking services
- **\$8.4 million over two years** to provide mental health services within Drug User Health Hubs

These are practical, evidence-based strategies that we know work because we have seen the results before.

Lastly, we thank legislators like Senator Nathalia Fernandez, who have bravely championed policies that sustain life-saving services across our state. We strongly urge legislators to support three initiatives to raise revenue to support substance use services by passing bills:

- **Strengthening the Drug Treatment and Public Education Fund (S8637/A9653)**
- **Alcohol Excise Tax (S4595/A9318)**
- **Redirecting the Opioid Excise Tax (S7641/A9311)**

New York has already shown what is possible when we invest in harm reduction. This is our opportunity to build on that success and save more lives.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to this work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Fabian', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Emma Fabian

Executive Director