

Testimony Introducing the CASAC Credential
New York State Mental Health Hearing

Good afternoon Chair and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is A. Maria Mendez, CASAC Adv. BS, Founder/CEO of the NYS Association of CASAC Professionals. I am here to introduce and clarify the role, training, and value of the Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor; CASAC credential in New York State.

CASACs are the backbone of New York's substance use disorder treatment and recovery system. We work across prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery support services in OASAS-licensed programs throughout the state. CASACs are often the first point of contact for individuals and families navigating addiction, mental health challenges, homelessness, justice involvement, and medical vulnerability.

Becoming a CASAC in New York is not quick or easy. The credential is tiered and progressive, requiring extensive education, supervised experience, and examination.

At the CASAC-Trainee (CASAC-T) level, individuals must complete at least 350 hours of OASAS-approved education, an additional eight (8) 1-hour trainings outside of the 350 hours, and work under supervision while accruing experience. To earn the CASAC credential, professionals must complete 6,000 hours of supervised experience, ongoing education, and continued compliance with OASAS standards. Advanced credentials such as the CASAC 2 require an associate's degree, CASAC Advanced require a bachelor's degree and an additional 30 hours of Clinical Supervision training, and the CASAC Masters require a master's degree.

This pathway often takes five to seven years, frequently while individuals are working full-time in high-stress clinical environments.

Within the OASAS treatment system, CASACs provide individual and group counseling, assessments, treatment planning, crisis intervention, relapse prevention, harm reduction education, re-entry and recovery support, and coordination with mental health, medical, housing, and justice systems. We are essential to detox, rehab, outpatient treatment, residential services, and community-based programs statewide.

Despite this, CASACs face significant and growing barriers.

Frequent regulatory changes, while well-intentioned, have documentation demands, billing complexity, and compliance pressure without staffing support, or compensation adjustments. CASACs are expected to adapt rapidly to new clinical, administrative, and technological requirements while remaining underpaid relative to similarly trained professionals in the behavioral health system.

Additionally, scope-of-practice confusion, reimbursement limitations, and lack of workforce parity have contributed to burnout, turnover, and workforce shortages at a time when demand for services continues to rise.

Today, we ask that CASACs be recognized as the highly trained, regulated professionals they are and that policy decisions consider the real-world impact on the workforce delivering these critical services.

Investing in CASACs is an investment in prevention, treatment access, recovery outcomes, and the sustainability of New York's behavioral health system.

Thank you for your time, and for your commitment to the communities we serve.