



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 19, 2022

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FRONTLINE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS PLEASED WITH EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSALS THAT MAKE CRITICAL INVESTMENTS IN MENTAL HEALTH AND SUD SERVICES WHILE ENFORCING CONSUMER/PROVIDER PROTECTIONS

ALBANY (January 19, 2022) - The 105 member organizations of the New York State Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare thank Governor Hochul for including several critical investments in her SFY 2022-23 executive budget proposal focused on supporting the ability for behavioral health providers to continue to respond to the multiple challenges facing our field including increased suicide rates, the opioid epidemic, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This includes correcting insurance practices to increase access to care for New Yorkers in need of mental health and addiction care services. The proposal would reinvest \$111M (state share) in the Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Office of Addiction and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS). With the federal match, the total reinvestment is \$222M over two years.

For almost two years, the NYS Council advocated for New York State to address a serious problem, ignored by the previous administration, in which overpayments made to some Medicaid managed care organizations that failed to meet required spending targets for actual care went uncollected. In addition, the state was required to calculate and reinvest the savings associated with the movement of behavioral health services to Medicaid managed care but failed to do so in a timely manner.

“Governor Hochul’s executive budget proposal seeks to remedy a significant problem it inherited from the former administration in which the state failed to ensure robust surveillance, monitoring, and enforcement of all contract provisions and regulations pertaining to the carve-in of behavioral health services into Medicaid managed care. This resulted in a failure to reinvest state resources into the mental health and substance use disorder systems of care over many years – and support providers that have been struggling to provide timely care to New Yorkers needing assistance for far too long,” said Lauri Cole, Executive Director of the NYS Council for Community Behavioral

Healthcare. “We are incredibly grateful to Governor Hochul for listening to us, seeing the problem we identified and fixing it. This is what responsive government looks like,” said Cole.

“The NYS Council was also gratified to see a budget proposal that would change the process by which the state identifies Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) that are paid to process reimbursement and manage certain aspects of the service delivery system for New Yorkers with Medicaid benefits,” said Cole. “Most states utilize a competitive process for the identification of MCOs. This reduces inefficiencies associated with individual provider organizations having to deal with the unique and often competing demands imposed on them by every MCO they transact business with. Right now, the only thing that should matter is that we find ways to ease administrative burdens on providers who are deluged with regulatory and other requirements while trying to attend to the acute and growing behavioral health needs of New Yorkers. Reducing the number of MCOs will allow providers to spend the majority of their time focused on provision of high-quality care for the individuals they serve, said Cole. This change is long overdue and again we thank Governor Hochul for putting it forward. “

“Finally, we applaud the Governor’s leadership in including payment parity requirements on insurers to cover telehealth services in the same manner as in-person care. This is especially important in our field where we must meet those we serve where they are using all means necessary to help to access needed addiction treatment and mental healthcare,” said Cole.

“We are eager to work with the Governor and Legislature to make sure these protections become law through the final State Budget this year.”

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About the NYS Council for Community Behavioral Health

The NYS Council is a statewide non-profit membership association representing the interests of 105 organizations that provide mental health and substance use disorder/addiction prevention, treatment and recovery services to tens of thousands of New Yorkers each day. Our members include free standing community-based agencies, general hospitals, and counties that operate direct services.