



## Behavioral Health Advocacy Organization's Response to Governor Hochul's SFY 2023-24 Executive Budget Proposal

Advocates for New Yorkers with mental health and addiction needs, and the community-based agencies that serve them acknowledge the overall and unprecedented support for mental health services in Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal. Many of the proposals are a step in the right direction after decades of neglect and underfunding of our system of care; however, we are perplexed by the 2.5% COLA the Governor has proposed. This amount does not deliver the resources we need to address the severe workforce crisis that is crippling our programs and delaying access to care. Let's be clear: The COLA is not just about staff salaries. It must also address ever increasing costs associated with operating our programs and services. Gas, food, utilities, insurance – this is a short list of the broad range of increased expenses we currently face. Like all households and businesses across the state and the country, we are reeling from current economic conditions that have inflated the real costs associated with retaining our staff and paying our bills.

Across the state, New Yorkers are waiting weeks and often times months before they can access our services. Post-COVID demand for care has skyrocketed and staff turnover has restricted our ability to meet demand for care. If we are truly going to “*fix New York State's continuum of mental health care*” and respond to New York's rising overdose deaths from the opioid epidemic, we must permanently address the funding gaps that are the primary barriers to timely on demand services for New Yorkers in need of mental health and substance use disorder care.

**We urge additional investments to bring us to the 8.5% COLA we have requested.** Our system of care has faced decades of underfunding for mental health and substance use disorder services. The Governor's vision for new and enhanced initiatives will only be possible with investments in our staff and increases to avoid program shutdowns.

We look now to the Legislature and the Governor to work collaboratively to improve on the proposed 2.5% COLA, and to include the \$500M in additional resources we requested to address serious long-term neglect of our system by the previous Administrations.

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