

THE SENATE  
STATE OF NEW YORK



**NATHALIA FERNANDEZ**  
SENATOR, 34TH DISTRICT

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ALCOHOLISM AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

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MENTAL HEALTH

TRANSPORTATION

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February 9, 2024

Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
NYS Senate  
172 State Street  
Capitol Building 330  
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Leader Stewart-Cousins,

**On behalf of the undersigned, we respectfully request the following investments in our one-house budget resolution to ensure that needed funding for mental health and substance use disorder agencies is included in the enacted SFY 2024-25 budget.** Specifically, we request the following be included in the Senate one-house resolution:

- 1) Include a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) tied to the Consumer Price Index-U (CPI) at **3.2%** (July 2023), and
- 2) **Add \$500 million** in additional resources to make up for decades of underfunding in mental health and substance use disorder services.

Governor Hochul's proposed budget included a 1.5% COLA, and community-based agencies in our districts tell us this is insufficient. The COLA supports an already underpaid workforce and addresses ever-increasing costs associated with operating programs and services, such as gas, food, utilities, insurance, etc. Like all households and businesses across the state and the country, behavioral health agencies continue to do more with less, as current economic conditions have inflated the real costs associated with retaining staff and maintaining their operations. Agencies that provide services to the most vulnerable adults, children, and families with mental health and substance use disorder must remain competitive with larger corporations that can pay well over minimum wage.

Since FY 2006-07, a COLA equal to the CPI-U has been included in unconsolidated law, but it has been "not withstood" for most of the intervening years. This has resulted in COLAs for behavioral health providers that total approximately **33% less** than the corresponding CPI-U for these years.

A 3.2% COLA and \$500 million in additional investments are necessary to sustain mental health and substance use disorder services across New York State.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathalia Fernandez', written in a cursive style.

Nathalia Fernandez  
NYS Senate District 34