



Aileen M. Gunther
Member of Assembly
100th District

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

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Mental Health Committee

CHAIR
Subcommittee on Women's Health

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Development

January 31, 2024

Hon. Carl E. Heastie, Speaker
New York State Assembly
932 LOB
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Speaker Heastie:

The Assembly has a longstanding history advocating for parity as it relates to insurance coverage of mental health and substance use disorder services (SUD) and parity with physical healthcare services. With this in mind, **we the undersigned members, write to seek the Assembly's support and inclusion in our one-house budget a provision in the SFY 2025 Executive Budget (Article VII, HMM, Part AA) to require commercial health plans to reimburse in network providers of outpatient behavioral services at or above the Medicaid rate.**

This proposal is consistent with legislation (A8839) that I have introduced to provide this important protection for mental health and SUD services.

For too long New Yorkers with commercial insurance benefits have faced disparate access to care due to a longstanding problem in which mental health and substance use disorder providers are reimbursed (on average) just **50%** of the state mandated reimbursement rate paid for services for those with Medicaid. This has meant that community-based providers are faced with an untenable situation of either turning an individual seeking needed care away or providing the care knowing they will be significantly underpaid by the individual's commercial insurer.

Every New Yorker should have equal access to mental health and addiction prevention, treatment, recovery, and harm reduction services regardless of the insurance card in their pocket, or if they lack insurance. At a moment when there are long waiting lists for these services, every tactic New York can implement to ensure access to care should be taken immediately to address the escalating overdose epidemic and increasing rates of suicide.

For these reasons, we urge wholehearted support for this proposal in our one-house budget bill to ensure New Yorkers with commercial insurance have an equal opportunity to access the care they need and deserve by putting an end to commercial insurers underpaying for these essential services for New Yorkers.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Aileen M. Gunther".

Aileen M. Gunther
Member of the Assembly