

RE: Rebuilding Safety Net Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Addiction Services for At-Risk New Yorkers

Dear Legislator:

As a constituent and a state employee represented by the Public Employees Federation (PEF), I write asking for your assistance with increasing state support for programs at agencies including OHM, OPWDD and OASAS.

These state agencies have suffered annually from budget cuts, closures, consolidations and privatization over the last decade. These agencies are charged with providing the most important safety net services for New York's most vulnerable citizens and these cuts have left too many of these New Yorkers unable to access needed services. Now is the time to reinvest in these critical state services and "Fund Our Future."

We appreciate that the Governor's budget proposal does increase funding for these agencies, but it does not provide enough resources to expand the accessibility of these services to all at-risk New Yorkers. PEF requests you consider the following:

REJECT Parts II and KK of the Health and Mental Health Article VII bill (S.8007/A.9007): These provisions perpetuate privatization and limit the ability of the state to manage and coordinate needed services for those who suffer from co-occurring disorders like individuals suffering from substance abuse and mental illness. Instead, we need to invest in critical state services that can coordinate care.

ADD \$200 million for Office for People with Developmental Disabilities: We ask you to support a new \$200 million appropriation and accompanying Article VII language to require the agency to use these funds to stop the closure of the more than 90 OPWDD-operated facilities currently closed or slated for closure and to build capacity to accommodate the growing need for residential placements. To effectuate this goal and provide needed services to other vulnerable New Yorkers, funds should be used to build incentives to hire and retain staff; to repair and rehabilitate dilapidated OPWDD operated residential homes; and to identify and acquire other state-owned or private property to address the need for services for the more than 3,000 individuals with developmental disabilities in need of immediate residential placement. We believe a portion of these resources should also be dedicated to improving the physical plant at the Institute of Basic Research on Staten Island, N.Y., so they can continue important research in this field. Expanding current state-operated residential capacity would result in the reunification of families who have been forced to send their loved ones to out-of-state facilities for treatment and would begin the process of addressing the longer-term needs of more than 10,000 individuals with developmental disabilities who are expected to require residential placements in the coming years. The state should not and cannot afford to ignore making the appropriate investments and planning to address this impending situation.

ADD \$100 million for the Office of Mental Health: We ask that you also support a \$100 million appropriation to the Office of Mental Health so we can restore many of the mental health stabilization beds that have been closed at various OMH facilities and so the state can develop capacity to address the

current mental health crisis more effectively. This funding should also be used to ensure that every mental health facility and every facility operated by the Office of Addiction Services and Supports has staff capable of rendering on-site diagnoses and to develop an immediate treatment plan for those who suffer from mental illness, addiction or co-occurring disorders, and to ensure appropriate state-operated treatment options are available in local communities across the state.

REJECT the Transfer of Children’s Psychiatric Unit at Hutchings Psychiatric Center to SUNY

Upstate: This proposed transfer will further cut children’s psychiatric beds in the five-county catchment area around Syracuse for the sole purpose of creating 11 new, statewide beds for youth suffering from the dual conditions of mental health and developmental disabilities. We know that the affected statewide population for this condition is larger than 11 children. So, instead of cutting youth psychiatric beds in the Syracuse region to address this clear need, we ask that you invest a portion of this new \$100 million appropriation into re-opening previously closed psychiatric beds at each OMH-operated psychiatric facility so we can treat all New Yorkers suffering from mental illness, addiction, developmental disabilities or those with co-occurring conditions. This new programming will expand capacity for all New Yorkers and enable those suffering from dual conditions, especially children, to remain near their families instead of travelling to Syracuse or out of state for treatment.

SUPPORT the 9-8-8 Hotline for Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Issues with Modifications

(Part EE of S.8007/A.89007): This hotline is critically needed, but to provide the highest level of service, appropriate oversight and the coordination of services from public and private providers, the hotline needs to be staffed by knowledgeable and trained state employees. The state’s current 9-1-1 program is operated by public employees to ensure the quality and continuity of service. Keeping the 9-8-8 program under the direct supervision of OMH allows the agency to collect first-hand data, measure service delivery and outcomes for both public and private service providers, and develop a network of coordinated services for those suffering from dual conditions.

As my elected representative, I kindly ask that you work with the leadership in your house to stop the privatization of vital state agency programs and begin the process of reinvesting in the state services so many New Yorkers need. Thank you for your time, attention and consideration of this very important issue.

Sincerely,
