

PRESS RELEASE

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Unprecedented Coalition Formed to Address Workforce Crisis
Without Legislative Action, New York's Most Vulnerable Risk Losing Access to Quality Behavioral Health Care

Launch Social Media Campaign to Inform General Public
#BreakingTheBarriersToCare
Advocacy Day is planned for January 29 in Albany

In an unprecedented move, leading behavioral health and human service organizations have joined forces to address a severe workforce crisis impacting their ability to recruit and retain expert, licensed staff and deliver timely services to New Yorkers in need. Specifically, they are requesting that the *Executive Budget*, to be released on January 16, propose a solution to the practice exemption for licensed behavioral health professionals in state-approved settings. The practice exemption is due to sunset in 2018.

The groups support a budget solution that will make permanent the current exemption for their workforce from a decade old Licensing Law that effectively restricts access to care for New Yorkers. Rather than expanding the ability to practice at a time when the demand for their services has never been higher, the Licensing law needlessly restricts the activities and tasks staff can perform, even when they are licensed, trained and experienced with those tasks. The groups seek a solution that not only expands the ability of other licensed professionals to expand their practice, but also provides a permanent exemption for staff who should not be restricted by the Law once the exemption expires.

“There is an alarming workforce crisis occurring at authorized mental health and substance use disorders treatment agencies,” said Christy Parque, President & CEO of The Coalition for Behavioral Health. “The organizations represented in this substantial and influential coalition call upon the state to act through the budget negotiations.”

In a letter sent to Governor Cuomo’s office and New York State Budget Director Robert Mujica, by 13 organizations stated, they “look forward to supporting the Executive in efforts to achieve a permanent exemption and thus place an end to enacting periodic extensions of exemptions to the State Education Law scope of practice requirements for licensed mental health practitioners in state-approved settings.” The letter said the current situation demands an agreement. There is unprecedented demand for treatment to address heroin and opioid addictions, prevent suicides and preclude avoidable and costly hospitalizations. There is also a never-before experienced level of workforce shortages in the behavioral health field.”

“With the exemption set to expire, mental health professionals licensed under Article 163 of the State Education Law are fearful that the workforce will shrink at a time when demand for services is increasing and their profession will have unnecessary limitations,” said Dr. Carol Podgorski, PhD, LMFT of the New York Association for Marriage & Family Therapy. “This is why we must not only address the issue, but also tackle the scope of practice for these vital licensed professionals”.

“The behavioral health field has been re-engineered under the Medicaid Redesign Team proposals,” said Andrea Smyth of the NYS Coalition for Children’s Behavioral Health. “However, the availability of licensed mental health practitioners is not sufficient to meet the demand. Delaying access to diagnosis for children is unacceptable.”

“Sunset of the exemptions threatens the jobs of thousands of addiction professionals serving communities of color and high-risk youth in school and community settings,” said John Coppola, Executive Director of the NY Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers (ASAP), “With the current pandemic of overdose death and addiction related to the opioid crisis, the timing could not be worse.”

The organizations signed on to the letter to the Budget Division are:

- Association for Community Living, Inc., Toni Lasicki, Executive Director
- Coalition of Medication Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates (COMPA), Allegra Schorr, President
- New York Association of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Providers (ASAP), John Coppola, Executive Director
- New York Association of Psychiatric Services (NYAPRS), Harvey Rosenthal, Executive Director
- New York State Care Management Coalition, Jackie Negri, Director
- New York State Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, Lauri Cole, MSW, Executive Director
- NY Association for Marriage & Family Therapy, Carol Podgorski, PhD, LMFT, Advocacy Chair
- NYS Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health, Andrea Smyth, Executive Director
- The Coalition for Behavioral Health, Christy Parque, President & CEO
- New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation, Michael Seereiter, Executive Vice-President & COO
- Therapeutic Community Association of New York (TCANY), Norwig Debye Saxinger, Executive Director
- The Mental Health Association of NYS, Glenn Leibman, Executive Director

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