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Mental Health Safety Net in Danger: State Budget Delays will Create Havoc for Recipients of Mental Health Services and Non-Profit Agencies

Albany, NY – The consequences of a late budget in Albany will have dire consequences for individuals with psychiatric disabilities and for the thousands of non-profit agencies that do the state’s work under contract with the state and local governments. In particular, the mental health safety net, the system of housing, employment, support, drop-in, emergency and crisis services that primarily serve people with serious and persistent psychiatric disabilities and children with serious emotional disturbances will no longer be funded as of July 1 unless a state budget is passed by mid June. The non-profit sector, which serves over 600,000 New Yorkers with psychiatric disabilities per year in communities around the state, will flounder. As a result, many recipients of services will suffer irreparable harm. The providers will not be able to make payroll, nor pay for goods and services and will likely have to close programs or shut their doors completely. When these non-profits can no longer pay bills, the result is a crisis in care and a negative economic ripple effect on local communities and in sectors that provide goods and services to them.

We urge the Senate, the Assembly and the Governor to move quickly toward a fair, three way budget agreement that protects the mental health safety net for thousands of New York’s most vulnerable citizens.

“The budget impasse will likely cease funding for all provider contracts and State Aid, which will stop funding that passes through to providers from counties and New York City. At risk are services to vulnerable consumers and jobs for professional staff”, said Phillip Saperia, Executive Director of the Coalition of Behavioral Health Care Agencies. “In this fiscal environment, bridge funding is all but unavailable except for a few. Even when funding is approved, it takes excessive amounts of time to register contracts and get money flowing to agencies. This budget delay is potentially a disaster in the making”

Toni Lasicki, Executive Director of the Association for Community Living explained that, *“The state’s system of non-profits provide vital services to New Yorkers that the state would otherwise have to provide itself, at a much higher cost. Without a budget, a vast array of services will receive no funding after July 1. For example, construction dollars for much needed low-income housing will not reach builders, halting projects. Also, thousands of people with psychiatric disabilities will be evicted from their apartments if dollars do not flow to Supported Housing providers - an onerous consequence that will result in needless increases in hospitalizations, homelessness, confusion and despair.”*

Glenn Liebman, CEO of the Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS) said, “Without passage of the budget within the next few weeks, there could well be dramatic decreases in the providing of mental health services in the community. People with psychiatric disabilities could face the closing of programs. Implications will be devastating for people who have to come to rely on these programs for their recovery.”

“The New York State Chapters of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention are deeply concerned about the impact a post June 30th budget will have on mental health services – primarily related to the suicide rate in NYS” said Mary Jean Coleman, MSW, the Upstate Regional Director for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). “Since 90% of all suicides are linked to some form of mental illness, NYS’s late budget, accompanied by a cutback in services, will clearly impact suicide rates.”

“Without immediate action by our leaders, New York’s budget crisis will soon have a tragic human face with the collapse of the community mental health safety net,” said Harvey Rosenthal, Executive Director of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services. “If there’s no money in a budget extender for the next quarterly payment, services and staff will be cut and vulnerable people will lose their housing without established state rental supports.”

Josh Koerner, Executive Director of Choices, a peer run agency in New Rochelle, makes an important point about those who are not Medicaid eligible. *“In our depressed economy, we are seeing an influx of people who are not Medicaid eligible due to recent loss of jobs. We have worked with spouses and children of the recently unemployed - helping to connect them to both benefits and services. This is yet another reason why services that cannot be funded any other way but through aid to localities are so vital to so many.”*

According to Paige Pierce, Executive Director of Families Together in New York State, even children will be adversely affected. She reminds us that *“If the budget is not passed in the next few weeks, smaller children’s programs may have to close their doors. These are the very programs that families say help them and their children the most.”*

For more information go to: <http://www.protectmhsafety.net/>

The following organizations represent the vast majority of the non-profits that provide services throughout New York State, under contracts with the state and local governments, to adults with serious and persistent psychiatric disabilities and to children with serious emotional disturbances.

Association for Community Living, Inc. (ACL)
Mental Health Association of New York State, Inc. (MHA-NYS)
New York State Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Inc. (NYAPRS)
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)
Choices, Inc.
The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies, Inc.
The NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
Families Together of New York State

The Geriatric Mental Health Alliance of New York
The Mental Health Empowerment Project (MHEP)
Supportive Housing Network of New York (SHNNY)