

Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

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Working to ensure available and accessible mental health services for all New Yorkers



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Legislative Issue Brief

Workforce/Community Support Services

Background

Timely access to mental health service depends on the strength and quality of direct care staff. Unfortunately, it has become extremely difficult over the years for mental health programs to recruit and retain quality staff. Due to the financial constraints in community based mental health programs, salaries are often smaller on average than many service related jobs such as K Mart and Wendy's. In addition, workers employed by the State under similar job titles make more money on average and also receive greater benefits. This creates an even greater disparity and makes it even more difficult to recruit quality staff in community programs.

We are encouraged that cost of living increases and health care enhancements already implemented in agencies serving people with mental retardation and developmental disabilities are showing a very positive impact on staff recruitment and retention in these programs. Similar steps should be taken on behalf of mental health workers.

Issues/Recommendations

Workforce Healthcare Enhancement

Issue: Successful recruitment and retention of qualified mental health care staff requires that employers be able to offer incentives that meet the tangible and immediate needs of prospective employees. Helping staff with the cost of healthcare is good public policy that specifically targets state resources, encourages healthy living and results in a healthier workforce.

Recommendation: Advocate for a healthcare enhancement stipend for direct care staff in mental health programs (\$10 million).* Specifically, we are asking for the legislature to provide \$2.5 million in the budget for the last quarter of 2008 for health care enhancements.

Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs)

Issue:

- Support the governor's proposed funding for a third year of the COLA (and support making the COLA permanent) as specified in the FY2008-09 Executive Budget.
- Support the Workforce Act that calls for increased training, enhancements and increasing COLA'S for mental health staff
- Support additional funding for community based mental health services

* *See attached MHANYS Memorandum of Support for S 6768 (Morahan)*

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