



**REMARKS OF CHRISTY PARQUE  
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THE COALITION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AGENCIES**

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2017  
EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARINGS  
May 24, 2016**

Good Morning, Chairwoman Ferreras-Copeland and members of the NYC Council Committee on Finance. I am Christy Parque, CEO of The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies (“The Coalition”).

The Coalition is the umbrella advocacy organization of New York's behavioral health community, representing nearly 140 non-profit community-based behavioral health and substance abuse agencies that serve more than 350,000 clients/consumers throughout NYC and surrounding counties. Our member agencies are on the ground, front-line safety net providers. The vast majority of the individuals served are on Medicaid. We treat some of the most needy clients, including those with dual diagnoses of mental health and substance abuse problems. Our providers serve the homeless and the formerly incarcerated, as well as victims of trauma and abuse. They serve people of all ages and every racial, cultural and ethnic background. The agencies we represent are in every Council District and neighborhood in the city.

I regret that I cannot be with you here today, but I respectfully submit these remarks for the record. Our members and I thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Mayor’s Fiscal Year (“FY”) 2017 Executive Budget proposal.

First, we need to thank you, and Council Members Andrew Cohen & Corey Johnson for their success in advocating for continued funding of the City Council Mental Health Initiatives that were baselined in FY 2015. In FY 2016, The NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (“DOHMH or “the Department”) intended to solicit RFPs for the Children Under 5 Mental Health, Geriatric Mental Health and Mental Health Contracts Initiatives.

Realizing the designations and funding for the RFPs would not be available prior to the end of the contract year; you, with the assistance of Council Members Cohen & Johnson, were able to convince the de Blasio administration to return the funds to the Council for an additional year. Without this action, programs would have ended and consumers would have been lost to care.

The Coalition is extremely pleased and proud that the Mental Health Services for **Court-Involved Youth and Families Initiative**, championed by Council Member Debi Rose, was adopted and expanded to a total of \$1.9 million by the Council in the current year's budget that thus far served 700 young people and their families this year.

### **Mental Health Contracts**

As I mentioned above, the **Council Mental Health Contracts Initiative** was baselined by the Mayor in FY '15. A modest amount of funds from this initiative have been used by **The Coalition's Professional Learning Center** and the remaining dollars by 5 distinct provider agencies serving all five boroughs. It is through the City Council's support over the last 16 years that The Coalition is able to provide critical education, technical assistance and training—unique learning opportunities—for staff and leadership of publicly funded behavioral health agencies. These learning experiences are available to local providers in every New York City community on pivotal issues related to organizational development, best practices, system transformation and regulatory issues that financially affect nonprofit community-based programs.

With the behavioral health system transitioning to managed and integrated care, community-based providers are relying more heavily on The Coalition for guidance and training. Through our Professional Learning Center, we empower the City's nonprofit providers to navigate and survive an uncertain world filled with mandated reforms. This year alone, The Coalition will have conducted 100 workshops for more than 2,000 mental health and substance use clinicians, peer advocates, support staff and administrators in over 100 agencies on these crucial issues and more.

At first blush, the “baselining” of this and other Council initiatives might appear to be a positive development. However, we have learned that the Department will be tendering these funds, in the case of The Coalition's grant, \$85,000, through an RFP process. We modestly believe that there is no other institution with the knowledge and experience to provide this technical assistance and guidance to community based behavioral health providers in New York City. Additionally, we have concerns that through this process the innovation and flexibility to adapt to client and community needs may be lost through the RFP and contracting process that has made this funding so impactful.

**The Mental Health Contracts Initiative** not only funds The Coalition's Professional Learning Center, but also supports the functioning of a transitional shelter for homeless women with mental illness run by the Center for Urban and Community Services (CUCS). Through this initiative, the City Council has made it possible for the Child Center of New York to provide mental health and substance use outreach to Asian immigrants who typically do not seek treatment due to the cultural stigma associated with receiving behavioral health services. It also sustains a senior health and consultation center that offers affordable primary care and mental health services operated by Greenwich House. This helps seniors to cope with and adjust to the major life changes that come with aging. The Council added several more providers to this initiative for the current fiscal year, including the Riverdale Mental Health Initiative, New

Alternatives for Children and Brooklyn Community Services who are each using these funds to supplement important programs.

As mentioned, the Department intends to release an RFP for this funding, but has told us that the RFP will not be released until *after* the budget process has been completed.

- **We, therefore, request that the City Council restore the Mental Health Contracts Initiative at the current year’s level of \$621,000 to ensure continuity of services.**

### **Children Under Five Mental Health Initiative**

Through the **Children Under Five Mental Health Initiative**, the City Council enables eight diverse agencies in all five boroughs of New York City to serve a cohort of children who exhibit behavioral difficulties because they have experienced or been exposed to traumas like domestic violence and abuse. The City Council was the only entity that funded these programs. This initiative helps to fund clinicians who are proficient in the interventions that work well with young children who may not yet be able to verbalize their experiences. They utilize trauma informed interventions to deliver innovative evidence-based and cutting-edge treatment modalities, including art, dance and movement therapy. Providers offer relationship-based assessments, interventions, treatment, referrals, as well as workshops for parents and grandparents on caring for children with emotional difficulties. These programs also offer an array of linkages for children and their families to access pediatricians, preschool teachers and child welfare workers.

Thanks to the leadership and support from the City Council, thousands of children between the ages of 0 and 5 have received services, potentially transforming the outcomes of their lives. The need for this initiative grows greater each year as more children are removed from nursery school and kindergarten classes due to behavioral problems. Identifying and evaluating children who may be exhibiting social and behavioral problems during the first few years of their life will prevent serious problems in adulthood. Left untreated, children’s mental health issues will likely worsen and bring larger costs later on, both financially and in terms of life outcomes.

Again, like the Mental Health Contracts Initiative, the **Children Under 5 Mental Health Initiative** has been baselined in this case at \$1.45 million.

The Department through Public Health Solutions released an RFP in January and we do have specific concerns with the Department’s proposal including the following:

1. It reduces the number of agencies funded from 8 to 6 which will limit the geographic scope and the ability to target communities with culturally competent services;
2. It will limit the scope of services provided; and
3. It ignores one of the primary successes of the **Children Under Five Initiative**—the ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of trauma-informed care when working with young children.

We understand that five of the eight original providers have been awarded grants. We request the Council restore funding to the three providers that did not receive funding and consider adding new providers to replace the others. We should continue the eleven years of success associated with the Council's vision.

### **Geriatric Mental Health Initiative**

From FY' 06 through FY '16 the Council supported the **Geriatric Mental Health Initiative**. Originally funded at \$1.2 million, the initiative is currently funded at \$2 million and is allocated to 25 community-based agencies (in all five boroughs of New York City) to provide specialized services to seniors dealing with behavioral health issues. These programs are run in places where older adults receive other services, in settings where they feel more comfortable, such as senior centers, religious and social group settings, primary healthcare provider locations or in their own homes for seniors who are homebound. The range of services offered includes outreach, education, depression and substance use screening, assessment, individual and group counseling, referral to treatment, as well as support for family caregivers. Through this initiative, older adults receive help with depression, anxiety, isolation, bereavement and any other circumstance that can occur as one ages, often accompanied by loss of family and social networks.

The need for this initiative has increased substantially. Medicare does not cover offsite visits to homebound elderly with mental illness. In addition, travel throughout the City can be burdensome or even impossible for many elderly adults. These special initiative dollars help to fill the gap and make mental health assistance possible for them. Each year, the population of older adults in New York City grows along with the number of older adults with symptoms of mental illness.

The Department through Public Health Solutions released an RFP for the **Geriatric Mental Health Initiative**, which proposed cutting the number of agencies funded from 25 to 8, as well as reducing the scope of services. We have heard that very few of our experienced and previously funded providers were successful in their applications for the RFP. Our colleagues at United Neighborhood Houses have analyzed the data and project that the funds are insufficient to meet the need.

One would assume that the Administration baselined these initiatives because they approved of the models and the services that the agencies were provided. What is being proposed in the Department's concept papers is nearly a complete departure from what the Council intended.

- **We call upon the Council for a restoration of all of these vital services.**

### **Mental Health Services for Court-Involved Youth and Families Initiative**

The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies strongly supports the restoration of the Council Member Rose sponsored initiative of \$1.9 million, which has expanded the capacity of community-based providers to meet the mental health needs of youth involved with the criminal justice and foster care systems and their families. The funding

has been allocated to nine service providers—Acacia, Astor Services for Children & Families, Catholic Charities Neighborhood Services, Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES), The Children’s Aid Society, The Fortune Society, Good Shepherd Services, Jewish Child Care Association of New York, New Alternatives for Children, The Osborne Association, Safe Horizon, SCO Family of Services, Staten Island Mental Health Society—and to The Coalition which has developed a training series tailored to the needs of behavioral providers who work with court-involved youth.

The initiative is in its second year, it has already touched the lives of more than 700 hundred young people and their families. The Coalition will provide specific numbers of youth screened, assessed and treated, as we near the end of the fiscal year. We believe that if the initiated is restored, we will begin to see even more impact in the coming fiscal year and hope you will continue this valuable project.

### **Council Funding for Veterans**

The Coalition strongly supports the Council’s initiative funding for veterans. Funding which totals \$940,000, provides employment, housing, legal, and mental health services across the five boroughs for the City’s veterans. We want to mention in particular the Homeless Prevention Services for Veterans Initiative, through which Coalition member Project Renewal provides services to veterans through its Culinary Arts Training Program; and the Mental Health Services for Veterans Initiative, which provides funding to the Mental Health Association of NYC to assist veterans in crisis.

### **CONCLUSION**

On behalf of our over 140 members in the metro region, The Coalition respectfully urges the Council to help ensure that the safety net provided by the community-based behavioral health sector is not only maintained, but made stronger, and more effective. Because you represent the neighborhoods and communities of this City, you know best the needs of your constituents. Our community-based providers are best situated to meet those needs, as reflected by your funding of those initiatives.

We believe the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene should honor The City Council’s intentions and fund these baselined initiatives in substance and process, as you have designed them and as they successfully have operated over the years. We know the Council is committed to ensuring that DOHMH will honor the aims and standards of these initiatives to ensure that no vulnerable consumer is lost to care.

Thank you again for the allowing me to testify before you today.