



Testimony of

Jason Lippman, Senior Associate for Policy and Advocacy of  
The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies, Inc.

At the Hearing on the  
FY 2011 Preliminary Budget

The Committee on Mental Health, Mental Retardation,  
Alcoholism, Drug Abuse and Disability Services  
Hon. G. Oliver Koppell, Chair

The Committee on Finance  
Hon. Domenic M. Recchia, Jr., Chair

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Koppell, Chairman Recchia, distinguished members of the Committees, thank you for affording us the opportunity to testify before you today on the Mayor's Fiscal 2011 Preliminary Budget. My name is Jason Lippman, and I am the Senior Associate for Policy and Advocacy of The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies (The Coalition).

## **CUTS TO MENTAL HYGIENE CONTRACTS**

We understand that the current economic environment requires the Mayor to make tough choices in the City's plan to close a \$500 million budget gap in Fiscal Year 2010, and a \$1.1 billion budget gap in Fiscal Year 2011. However, The Coalition is concerned that the Mayor's Preliminary Budget intends to cut funding in the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to Mental Hygiene Contractors, once again, as a means to balance the City's budget. The Fiscal Year 2011 Preliminary Budget calls for an additional cut of \$2.2 million in FY 2010, and \$6.4 million in FY 2011 and out. Last year, The Coalition testified before this committee last year to oppose a similar cut to contracts, which was enacted at \$1.1 million per fiscal year.

We appreciate the Department's judicious efforts in its choice of cuts and in using unallocated funds from closed programs to meet PEG targets. We believe that cutting programs that provide prevention and treatment services to consumers with mental illness and substance abuse issues is not necessarily an effective cost savings approach. For example, Staten Island has the highest rates of alcoholism and underage drinking out of the five boroughs, yet the Department plans to cut alcoholism prevention funding in a program run by the Staten Island Mental Health Society (SIMHS). People who fail to get treatment now for mental illness usually

wind up costing more for care in the future. People who cannot access services in the community usually cost the City more in treatment provided at inpatient hospitals and emergency rooms. Treatment for behavioral health issues also allows consumers to be productive members in the community, with stable jobs and incomes.

Community-based providers in the City's public mental hygiene system are also experiencing the impacts of the economic downturn. Providers are struggling not only from a decline in City funding over the years, but a decline in resources from other levels of government, in foundation and in philanthropic dollars. This is all occurring as the City's demand for mental health and substance abuse services increases. Providers are forced to run their programs with higher caseloads on tighter budgets. Agencies are forced to close some programs, denying care to their community residents in need.

#### **CITY COUNCIL FUNDED PROGRAMS**

We regrettably report that although there have been some Department improvements in contracting, delays in the contracting process for City Council funded mental hygiene programs continue to inhibit the delivery of services. Contracts are still not registered on time, and payments to agencies lag far behind the provision of services. While some providers are able to subsidize from private and other funds to run their programs until City Council funding is disbursed, most cannot float the necessary expenses required to provide seniors and children with the vital services they require. In addition, The Coalition's Fiscal Year 2010 City Council authorized contract for our Professional Learning Center has not been registered.

Over the past five years, the City Council has provided its support to programs that meet the specific needs of New Yorker's with psychiatric disabilities at vulnerable phases in their

lives. Older adults receive mental health services to treat symptoms that occur late in life through the City Council's Geriatric Mental Health Initiative. Children who exhibit signs of emotional disturbance receive early assessment and/or preventative treatment from the City Council's Children Under Five Initiative. When funding provided by the City Council gets distributed on time, these programs not only enrich the lives of the individuals who receive services, but fill a number a gaps in the City's public mental health system. The Coalition thanks you for your ongoing support of these two critical initiatives and urges you to continue your forceful monitoring of Department contract procedures and outcomes.

#### *Geriatric Mental Health Initiative*

We ask the City Council to continue its support for the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative in Fiscal Year 2011. This year, the City Council allocated \$2.4 million to 24 community-based agencies (in all five boroughs of New York City) to provide specialized services to seniors dealing with mental illness. These programs are run in places where older adults receive other services, in settings where they feel comfortable, such as senior centers, religious and social group settings or in their own homes. The range of services offered includes outreach, education, screening, assessment, onsite treatment, referral to treatment, as well as support for family caregivers. Older adults receive help with depression, anxiety, isolation, bereavement and any other circumstance that can occur as one ages.

The need for this initiative grows even more important each year as the population of older adults in New York City increases and the number of older adults with symptoms of mental illness rises. By 2030, it is predicted that the number of older adults in need of mental

health services in our City will grow by 50% (from 200,000 individuals as measured in 2005, to 300,000 people).

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

We also strongly support the restoration of \$1.6 million to fund the Children Under Five Initiative. This program enables providers to identify symptoms of emotional disturbance in children during the first few years of life. Identifying these issues as early as possible, so that children and their families can receive preventive services between the ages of 0 and 5, we are not only helping them, but are avoiding the need for more expensive treatment in the future. Because of the assistance from the City Council, 8 agencies throughout New York City have provided vital assistance to over 3,000 children and their families, potentially changing the outcomes of their lives. Providers can identify and assess children who may be exhibiting behavioral problems like depression, anxiety and aggressive behavior. They can step in and offer state of the art interventions in family settings. Children receive therapy in art and movement programs. Parents and Grandparents can participate in workshops on caring for children with emotional difficulties.

#### *The Coalition's Professional Learning Center*

For the last 12 years, the City Council has supported The Coalition's Professional Learning Center. This year alone, The Coalition will have provided 45 workshops to over 2,000 mental health and substance abuse clinicians and administrators. Through a \$100,000 City Council grant, we are able to conduct workshops on Motivational Interviewing, Cognitive Behavioral Counseling, Harm Reduction Principles, Contingency Management, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Working with Multi-Cultural Populations, Concurrent Documentation

Techniques, Medicaid Compliance, Federal Compliance, Enhancing Clinic Operations, Delivering Quality Clinical Care, Documentation and Billing for the new OMH Clinic Regulations, Documentation and Billing for new PROS providers and Advanced Management Training. We ask the City Council to restore funding to The Coalition's Professional Learning Center so that we can continue to support the delivery of quality of care by providing up-to-date knowledge and strategies to comply with laws, regulations and industry wide program changes.

We thank you for your time today, and are available to answer any questions you may have.

#### **About The Coalition**

The Coalition is the umbrella nonprofit, (501)(c)(3), association and public policy advocacy organization of New York's behavioral health providers, representing over 100 non-profit behavioral health agencies. Taken together, these agencies serve more than 350,000 adults and children and deliver the entire continuum of behavioral health care in every neighborhood of a diverse New York City, Westchester County and surrounding areas.

Founded in 1972, the mission of the Coalition is to coordinate the efforts of government and the private sector toward efficient delivery of quality behavioral health services to children, adults and families. The Coalition promotes policies and practices that support the development and provision of community based housing, treatment, rehabilitation, and support services to all people with mental illness and addictions disorders. Our members serve a diverse group of recipients, including the fragile elderly, people who are homeless, those who struggle with AIDS and other co-morbid health conditions, violence and other special needs. Coalition members help people with mental illness and addiction disorders to recover and lead productive lives in their communities.

The Coalition provides quality learning opportunities, technical assistance and training to staff and leadership of its member agencies and to the professional community on important issues related to rehabilitation and recovery, organizational development, best practices, quality of care, billing and regulations/contract compliance, technology and finance.