



Testimony of

Phillip A. Saperia, Executive Director of
The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies, Inc.

At the Hearing on the
Mayor's Fiscal 2010 Executive Budget

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

The Committee on Finance
Hon. David Weprin, Chair

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Koppell, Chairman Weprin, distinguished members of the Committees, thank you for affording us the opportunity to testify before you today on the Mayor's Fiscal 2010 Executive Budget. My name is Phillip A. Saperia, and I am the Executive Director of The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies, the umbrella advocacy organization of New York's behavioral health community, representing over 120 non-profit community-based mental health and substance abuse agencies in metropolitan New York City. Our members constitute a broad cross section of service providers – all sizes from very small to very large; treatment and rehabilitation-oriented; outpatient and residential; focused on linguistically and culturally specific populations and on many special-needs – serving more than 350,000 individuals each day in the five boroughs of New York City and in neighboring counties.

CITY COUNCIL FUNDED PROGRAMS

The City Council has enriched the lives of New Yorker's with psychiatric disabilities by providing funding to programs that can meet the direct needs of unique populations: older adults who require mental health services as they age, and children under five who begin to exhibit signs of mental illness and require early support. In doing so, the City Council is addressing a number of the shortcomings in the City's mental health system. We thank you for your diligent backing of these essential programs.

An ongoing concern of ours has been the City's contracting process for City Council funded programs. Since we last testified at the hearing on the Preliminary Budget, we have yet to see significant improvements. As we come to the close of the current fiscal year, the majority of providers have not received the funding needed to operate their programs. Most nonprofit

community-based providers require the timely distribution of funds to provide services, in this case to people at critical points in their lives: e.g., the grandmother who could have been screened for depression at her local senior center, or the child who exhibits symptoms of emotional disturbance which are causing him to fall behind his classmates at school.

Geriatric Mental Health Initiative

We urge the City Council to continue supporting the Geriatric Mental Health Services initiative. In fiscal year 2009, the City Council allocated \$2.4 million to this program. This funding becomes more critical each year as the population of older adults in New York City that need mental health services is quickly increasing. It is predicted that this cohort will grow by 50% from 2005 to 2030, from 200,000 to 300,000 individuals, with each borough experiencing different rates of growth.

Restoration and timely funding by the City Council will enable the 24 agencies that were awarded contracts in FY 2009 to provide specialized services such as education on mental illness symptoms, mobile geriatric services, adult protective services and integrated models for substance abuse and mental health issues. Past experience has shown that when these contracts are registered and executed on time, providers are able to deliver services to older adults in settings where they already feel comfortable and receive other services, such as in the home or at senior centers. Regrettably, the contracting process has truncated these services. While some providers are able to provide advance program subsidy, from their other funds, in order to provide these vital programs to seniors, most programs cannot afford this luxury. They need the dollars in order to afford the provision of the services. If the contracting process could be fixed, providers would be able to implement new strategies to reach out to communities,

including Asian and Latino populations, and individuals who live in naturally occurring retirement communities or NORCS, offering mental health workshops, depression screenings and organize weekly support groups for family members of individuals who are taking care of a relative or friend with dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

Children Under Five Mental Health Initiative

We also support the restoration of \$1.6 million to fund the City Council's Children Under Five Mental Health initiative. Again, with an expedited contracting system in place, funding for this program would allow providers to identify symptoms of emotional disturbance in children during the first few years of their life. To the extent that these children can receive services before the age of 5, we are not only helping the child but are preventing the need for treatment that will be more costly in the future.

With the assistance of the City Council, and the on-time registration of contracts, 8 agencies throughout New York City will be able to provide vital, needed and timely assistance to children who have experienced trauma early in their lives, whether it is from neglect or abuse, or the loss of a parent. Providers can identify and assess children at an early age who may be exhibiting behavioral problems such as depression, anxiety and aggressive behavior towards other kids. They can step in and offer interventions like individual, family and group therapy, art and movement therapy, and workshops for parents and grandparents. Through their diligent work, it is possible to change the outcome of a child's life.

The Coalition's Professional Learning Center

For the past 11 years, the City Council has provided \$100,000 to fund The Coalition's Professional Learning Center. In the past year, we have provided 42 workshops to over 1,700

individuals on topics such as: Integrated Dual Diagnosis Training, Motivational Interviewing, Principles of Cognitive Behavioral Counseling, Harm Reduction – Psychopharmacology, Medicaid Compliance, Medicaid and Medicare Documentation and Billing, HIPPA Compliance, Automated Medical Records, Advanced Management Training, Subpoena of a Medicaid Record, Working with Multi-Cultural Populations and Understanding New Federal Initiatives. We ask that the City Council restore funding to The Coalition’s Professional Learning Center so that we can continue to provide local community agencies with up-to-date strategies for coping with industry-wide changes; changes improve services and some that if not complied with, could mean the loss of dollars from audits.

I would now like to focus on community based contracts for mental hygiene services that are funded directly by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH).

CUTS TO MENTAL HYGIENE CONTRACTORS

We are grateful that the Mayor’s Fiscal 2010 Executive Budget proposal spared further cuts to the City’s mental health and substance abuse service providers who contract with DOHMH. Yet we are troubled by the fact that the budget has not restored cuts to DOHMH that will reduce funding to contracted mental hygiene providers by \$1 million in FY 2010 and \$3 million in the out years.

In this economic downturn, providers are running programs on very tight budgets with increasing caseloads from New Yorker’s reporting higher incidences of depression and anxiety from loss of employment, meeting their mortgage payments or any other dire situation that comes from recession. The City’s community-based providers that receive funding from the DOHMH, are at the same time, also experiencing the consequences of funding cuts at other

levels of government and an overall reduction in philanthropic revenue. They will also be picking up the adverse spillover from mental hygiene cutbacks to the City's Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC).

We urge the Mayor and City Council to restore these damaging cuts to DOHMH contracted providers. We also ask that the City Council consider alternatives to raise revenues in a progressive manner or seek savings in the City budget without harming essential services, as proposed by the One New York: Fighting for Fairness Coalition.

We thank you for your time today. I am available to answer any questions you may have.