



Testimony of

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The Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies, Inc.

At the Hearing on the
FY 2012 Preliminary Budget

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

The Subcommittee on Drug Abuse
Hon. Ruben Wills, Chair

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

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INTRODUCTION

Chairperson Koppell, Chairperson Wills, Chairperson Recchia, distinguished members of the Committees, thank you for affording us the opportunity to testify before you today on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2012 (FY12) 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).

Mayor Bloomberg's FY12 Preliminary Budget proposes to close an approximately \$4.6 billion budget gap. In doing so, we believe that it is fiscally prudent to support the initiatives that augment community-based services. Behavioral Health programs run in the community by not-for-profit mental health and substance abuse providers save taxpayer dollars because they help divert high need consumers from more costly inpatient hospitals and emergency rooms, as well as jails, and help prevent homelessness.

The Coalition understands the difficult situation that the City faces to close the budget gap in the next fiscal year. The dilemma is how to balance the budget, while at the same time, maintain the social safety net. However, we wish to point out that through this economic crisis, community-based providers have also reported larger caseloads, reflecting the consequences of job loss and economic hardship, resulting in more depression, anxiety, substance abuse, family disturbance, etc. These personal and family hardships, in an environment of fewer available resources, increase the difficulty in meeting current demands for service. With each round of budget cuts, Coalition's member agencies, particularly smaller providers, have been forced to reduce community-based behavioral health programs in order to remain fiscally viable. We expect further cuts, as City agencies, including the Department of Health and Mental

Hygiene (DOHMH) were asked this month to cut an additional 4% in the upcoming FY12 Executive Budget.

DOHMH FUNDED PROGRAMS

The Mayor's Preliminary Budget maintains the cuts that were proposed in the November Plan. In DOHMH, the budget proposes to cut \$1.8 million in funding in FY11 and \$4.8 million in FY12 for *Mental Hygiene Contracted Services*. Over the last few years, mental hygiene contracted services have undergone several rounds of budget cuts. In the last sequence, approximately \$2.5 million are proposed to be cut from psychosocial clubs and bridger programs in FY12. The availability of psychosocial clubs in the community allows people to recover from mental illness, achieve vocational training and placement and strengthen peer networks and community ties. Bridger programs assist individuals who are discharged from state psychiatric centers to access appropriate community supports. In addition, medically supervised outpatient services and outpatient rehabilitation programs will be cut by \$1 million in FY12. While we recognize that the Department is faced with difficult choices and has made every attempt to maintain clinical services, it is important not to underestimate the significance of these kinds of services and the critical support they provide to needy consumers.

The Coalition is also concerned about the indirect impact that the proposed cuts titled "*Intra-Cities with HHC*" and "*Intra-City Agreements for Mental Hygiene*" will have on the not – for-profit behavioral health sector. Together, intra-city agreements between DOHMH and HHC, DHS, HRA or CUNY provide for the operation of various mental health, alcohol/substance abuse and homeless services. If these programs are eliminated, the individuals served will continue to look to community-based providers for support. As previously mentioned, these not-for-profits

are facing budget cuts in many other public and private revenue sources. Overstretched caseloads will be pushed even further, diminishing the sustainability of treatment and rehabilitation for individuals already receiving more intensive levels of care.

CITY COUNCIL FUNDED PROGRAMS

We would like to point out how important it is for contracts to be registered on time so that Council dollars can begin to flow to providers, and they can deliver the intended services to constituents. When interruptions occur in the contracting process, whether it is in delays in notification, registration or reimbursement, it affects the providers' ability to maintain staff and deliver services. At **9 months** into this fiscal year, we are still hearing from member agencies that they have not received funding and/or had their contracts registered. We ask the City Council to enhance its oversight of the contracting process.

Each year, the City Council provides funding to support mental health and chemical dependency needs of New Yorkers who are currently underserved. Programs like *Mental Health Contracts* (which includes funding for The Coalition's Professional Learning Center), *Alcoholism/Substance Abuse Voluntary Sector*, the *Children Under Five Mental Health Initiative* and the *Geriatric Mental Health Initiative* help to fill gaps in the City's behavioral health system.

The Coalition's Professional Learning Center- Restore \$85,000

Over the last 13 years, the City Council has provided funding to The Coalition's Professional Learning Center (PLC). The PLC provides quality learning opportunities, technical assistance and training to staff and leadership of publically funded behavioral health agencies throughout New York City on important issues related to organizational development, best practices and other subjects that financially impact programs. These trainings will include

navigating mandatory enrollment of behavioral health agencies into behavioral health organizations (BHOs), maximizing Medicaid and Medicare revenues, compliance with audits by the Medicaid Inspector General (OMIG) and seeking funding opportunities through the Affordable Care Act. This year alone, The Coalition will have conducted 29 workshops for 1,500 mental health and substance abuse clinicians, peer advocates, support staff and administrators.

We ask the City Council to restore \$85,000 in funding for The Coalition's Professional Learning Center. This funding will allow the PLC to continue to provide learning experiences and technical assistance to agencies, Citywide, with limited resources. In doing so, we help them to prepare for and be up-to-date on all of the new mandates, compliance issues and frequent changes in rules and regulations.

Alcoholism/Substance Abuse Voluntary Sector – Restore \$335,000

Funding provided by the City Council has allowed 8 agencies in all five boroughs of New York City to operate a range of alcoholism and substance abuse prevention and treatment programs for children, adults and families struggling with drug and alcohol abuse. This initiative also reaches adolescents in underserved minority communities who do not have health insurance. One program offers alcoholism and substance abuse treatment specifically in Asian communities, by providing outreach, education and treatment for chemical dependency issues. A restoration of \$335,000 will allow these providers to continue to serve these needy consumers.

Children Under Five Mental Health Initiative- Restore \$1,250,000

The Children Under Five Initiative is a City Council funded program that allows 8 providers throughout New York City to identify and evaluate children who may be exhibiting

social and behavioral difficulties during the first few years of their life. Providers offer relationship-based assessments, interventions, treatment and referrals. They deliver innovative and cutting-edge treatment modalities, including art, dance and movement therapy.

Agencies also offer workshops for parents and grandparents on how to care for children with emotional difficulties. When these issues are identified as early as possible, and children and their families receive preventive services, we not only help them, but avoid the need for more expensive treatments in the future. Because of help from the City Council, over 3,000 children between the ages of 0 and 5 have received services, potentially changing the outcomes of their lives. The need for this initiative grows each year as the number increases of children who are removed from nursery school and kindergarten classes due to behavioral problems. Therefore, we strongly support the restoration of \$1.25 million to fund this initiative.

Geriatric Mental Health Initiative – Restore \$2,000,000

We ask the City Council to continue its support for the Geriatric Mental Health Initiative in FY12. This year, the City Council allocated \$2 million to 25 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 more comfortable, such as senior centers, religious and social group settings or in their own homes. The range of offered services 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, often accompanied by loss of family and social networks.

The need for this initiative has increased substantially. The Coalition has learned that offsite visits to homebound elderly with mental illness will no longer be covered by Medicaid. These special initiative dollars help to fill the gap and make assistance possible. Moreover, each year, the population of older adults in New York City increases along with the number of older adults with symptoms of mental illness.

Mental Health Contracts – Restore \$450,000

Funding for Mental Health Contracts allows 7 agencies to provide behavioral health services in the community through a variety of delivery models, including The Coalition's Professional Learning Center, which I mentioned earlier. The City Council's Mental Health initiative also pays for a transitional living community for homeless women with psychiatric disabilities and a forensic mental health program. This funding enables providers to reach out to underserved and minority populations that typically do not seek treatment because of the stigma associated with receiving mental health and addiction services. A restoration of \$450,000 will allow providers to continue to offer comprehensive treatment to the most vulnerable and high need populations in New York City.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the 100 plus agencies that we represent throughout New York City and beyond, The Coalition respectfully urges the Council to help ensure that the safety net provided by the community-based behavioral health sector remains intact and effective.

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.