



Memorandum in Support

S632/A833

AN ACT to amend the tax law, in relation to establishing a gift for eliminating the stigma relating to mental illness on personal income tax returns; to amend the state finance law, in relation to establishing a mental illness anti-stigma fund; and to amend the mental hygiene law, in relation to directing the office of mental health to provide grants to organizations dedicated to eliminating the stigma attached to mental illness and persons with mental health needs

MHANYS supports S632 (Carlucci)/A833(Gunther) on behalf of all New Yorkers impacted by mental illness and the stigma too often associated with these illnesses, as well as for future generations of people who will encounter the challenges of mental illness and damaging stigma.

According to recent statements by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the stigma often associated with mental illness causes needless suffering, potentially causing a person to deny symptoms, delay treatment and refrain from daily activities. Stigma can exclude people from access to housing, employment, insurance, and appropriate medical care. Thus, stigma can interfere with prevention efforts, and examining and combating stigma is a public health priority. Similarly, the Mayo Clinic identifies some of the harmful effects of stigma as including:

- Lack of understanding by family, friends, colleagues or others you know
- Discrimination at work or school
- Difficulty finding housing
- Bullying, physical violence or harassment
- Health insurance that doesn't adequately cover your mental illness
- Negative beliefs about ones prospects for recovery from mental illnesses

Recent highly publicized acts of violence have regrettably added to an historic tide of negative public sentiment and myth surrounding mental illness. Without concerted anti-stigma public awareness and education campaigns there is little hope in combatting what the media, the entertainment industry and public discourse continue to perpetuate. A personal income tax “check off” fund for anti-stigma can provide for this need without resorting to already stressed public resources, especially those scant resources directed at much needed mental health treatment. Instead, this voluntary method of raising funds places the responsibility directly on the public conscience and appeals to individuals’ choice to do the right thing. Similar efforts in support of an array of worthy social causes including breast cancer and Alzheimer’s research and wildlife preservation have demonstrated that given the choice people rise to the challenge.

Based on the aforementioned reasons MHANYS strongly supports S632/A833 and urges the Legislature to pass it into law.

...working to ensure available and accessible mental health services to all New Yorkers