



## Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

Glenn Liebman, MA  
CEO

Ellen Pendegar, MS, RN  
Board Chair

### **Memorandum in Support** S.2261 (Sanders)/A.7366 (Englebright)

*AN ACT* to amend the labor law, in relation to establishing healthy work-places

MHANYS supports S.2261/A.7366 on behalf of all New Yorkers who have a right to a healthy and safe work environment free from abuse of any kind. This legislation would establish a civil cause of action for employees who are subject to an abusive work environment. Our comments are offered primarily from a mental health perspective, on behalf especially of all individuals who live with a mental illness, or who will one day experience mental illness while employed in a workplace environment.

The World Health Organization has been quoted as saying “there is no health without mental health”. The fact is that one-in-five Americans experienced mental illness in the past year. This statistic includes people with persistent mental illness as well as those experiencing isolated acute symptoms of mental illness. Many of these people work among us every day and manage to maintain employment and even thrive in spite of the challenges their illnesses present. Abusive behavior in the workplace puts these particular individuals at greater risk of further psychological suffering and damage, lost wages and ultimately lost productivity and employment.

MHANYS also supports S.2261/A.7366 because of the psychological harm that can occur to anyone employed in “mentally unsafe” workplaces. By any reasonable standard, work environments where abuse can occur, especially without a means to resolve the abuse, are not mentally hygienic spaces. Psychological and emotional abuse impacts not only existing mental health conditions, but can also contribute to the development of new symptoms and illnesses, which absent the abusive situation, may never had occurred.

Whether we consider ourselves relatively mentally well or we are challenged by a mental illness, our work day is an integral part of our lives. The relationships we have with people at work and the environmental conditions under which we must work have serious implications for both our physical and mental well-being. By helping to limit the occurrence of abuse in the workplace and providing a viable recourse for victims of abuse, this bill, we believe, takes a stride toward helping to protect everyone’s health and mental health while at work.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, MHANYS supports S.2261/A.7366, which we believe would be a significant contribution toward assuring that our workplaces are physically and mentally healthy.

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#### **HEALTHY MINDS FOR A HEALTHY NEW YORK**

194 Washington Avenue, Suite 415 • Albany, New York 12210-2314  
Phone: 518-434-0439 • Fax: 518-427-8676 • MHANYS.org