



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

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Memorandum in Support

A.3074 (Abinanti)/S.3834 (Metzger)

AN ACT to amend the public health law, in relation to the provision of certain professional services to children's camps and camps for children with developmental disabilities

MHANYS supports A.3074 (Abinanti)/S.3834 (Metzger) which would allow children's overnight camps, summer day camps, traveling summer day camps and camps for children with developmental disabilities to employ certain specified licensed health care professionals, in order to better serve the mental and physical needs of children during their summer camp experience.

Mental health issues impact each of us daily either personally or through the experiences of family members, loved ones, or friends. One in five adults and children have a mental health diagnosis. In New York, over 300,000 of our youth are living with a serious mental health condition that significantly impairs their daily functioning. About half of all chronic mental health conditions begin by age 14, half of all lifetime cases of anxiety disorders begin at age 8, and 22% of youth aged 13-18 experience a serious mental disorders in a given year.

This data suggests a significant likelihood that any given child camper will either go to camp with a pre-existing mental health disorder, attend camp with an undetected mental health condition or manifest the first onset of symptoms of mental distress while at camp. Unfortunately, legal barriers continue to exist that prevent camps from being able to effectively respond to the inevitable mental health needs of campers. Further, for children with a mental health diagnosis, it is discriminatory that camps cannot provide interim mental health care and/or monitoring while these children are away from their usual treatment provider. Finally, children with developmental disabilities require additional services that should be continued at camp. This bill will ensure that the licensed professionals and practitioners needed to provide these necessary services are available. No reasonable person would send an insulin dependent child with diabetes to a camp with no access to a medical doctor or nurse. Should a child with panic disorder or depression be deprived of the experience of camp because the law doesn't allow camps to have mental health professionals on staff?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 12 high school students have attempted suicide. Over 90% of youth who die by suicide completion were suffering from depression or another diagnosable and treatable mental illness at the time of their death. Mental health crises are not

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uncommon and can be precipitated by stressful events such as being away from home at camp. Many medical professionals such as nurses and doctors, which camps are currently permitted to have on staff, are not well-informed about mental health related issues and/or how to respond to mental health crisis such as suicide, self-harm and panic attacks. Camps should have the ability to respond to such emergencies when necessary with suitably trained mental health professionals.

MHANYS along with other mental health advocacy organizations fought hard to establish mental health parity in New York State through the passage of Timothy's Law, which assured that New Yorkers would receive insurance coverage for mental health disorders on par with coverage for physical health conditions. Since the passage of Timothy's Law, the Affordable Care Act became law and provides similar parity assurance at the federal level. The intent of A.3074/S.3834 is consistent with the spirit of parity laws insofar as it would create parity in the ability of campers to access mental health services commensurate with access to physical health care while at camp. To effectively deprive campers of access to mental health services, when needed and while at camp, violates the spirit of parity and promotes the unfounded notion that mental health care is not as important or necessary as physical health care.

Based on the aforementioned reasons MHANYS strongly supports A.3074/S.3834 and we urge and recommend its passage into law.