



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

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Memorandum in Support A.10629 (Gunther)

AN ACT to amend the mental hygiene law, in relation to establishing the
frontline workers trauma informed care advisory council

MHANYS supports A.10629, which would establish an advisory council within the Office of Mental Health that would ensure the trauma related behavioral health needs of frontline workers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic are met.

Based on what we now know from historical pandemics, other global health crisis and events that cause collective trauma, it is reasonable and responsible to anticipate the trauma-related behavioral health needs of frontline workers engaged in the COVID-19 pandemic response. Data from other outbreaks suggest that those impacted will experience high rates of anxiety, depression, substance use issues, acute stress and, eventually, PTSD. A study of health care workers during the 2003 SARS outbreak, for example, found that 89% of workers at high risk of contracting the virus reported negative psychological effects. Another study found SARS-related fear was correlated with symptoms of PTSD.

We are already learning about the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic globally. One survey of physicians and nurses at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in China found that about 50% reported symptoms of depression, 44% reported symptoms of anxiety and 34% reported insomnia. There is little reason to expect a significantly different impact here in the U.S. and in New York, which experienced one of the largest COVID-19 outbreaks of anywhere in the world.

MHANYS is particularly concerned about frontline workers in health and mental health care settings and first responders. We believe that it's vital to anticipate their mental health and addiction needs for two important reasons. First, they will need help coping with the symptoms of trauma and we as a state owe these heroes a debt for all they sacrificed. Second, we need these workers to be healthy because we count on them for the services they provide every day, and we will need them in the future for the ongoing needs associated with COVID-19.

MHANYS commends Assemblymember Gunther for taking proactive steps to anticipate and address predictable behavioral health needs of frontline workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe that the formation of a trauma informed care advisory council will prove to be an efficient and thorough means of assuring the accurate targeting and substance of help for these workers.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, MHANYS strongly supports A.10629. We urge its passage.

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