



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

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Memorandum in Support

S.7194 (Rivera)/A.6395-B (Woerner)

AN ACT to amend the state finance law, the mental hygiene law, and the executive law, in relation to establishing an opioid settlement fund

The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) supports S.7194 (Rivera)/A.6395-B (Woerner), which was passed in the State Legislature on June 17, 2021 and now awaits the Governor's signature. This legislation would establish an opioid settlement fund and advisory board to insure that any settlement monies are dedicated towards substance use disorder prevention, treatment and recovery, and not diverted away for other uses unrelated to the addiction crisis.

At no other time in our state's history is funding more crucial for addressing the deleterious effects of substance misuse in general and the opioid crisis in particular. The most recent data totaling the number of drug overdose deaths in New York involving opioids totaled 2,991 in 2018. While exact numbers for New York in 2021 have yet to be tallied, other indicators point to sharp increases in opioid use and overdoses in New York, especially since the onset of the COVID pandemic. According to a Siena College Research Institute poll the percentage of New Yorkers who report being affected by opioid abuse has grown in the last two years, with 59 percent (up from 54% in 2018) reporting that they or someone they know has abused opioids. The same poll shows that 29 percent (up from 24%) reported knowing someone who's died of an opioid overdose. Other research suggests that the percent in overdose deaths in New York increased by nearly 40% from January–August 2020 vs. a 30% increase for the same months in 2019.

It's critical that incoming settlement money is actually spent on what it was intended for: prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery services. Unfortunately, this is not a guarantee. In fact, just a few months ago, it was revealed that New York has directed the vast majority of initial settlement dollars from McKinsey & Company not toward addiction programs, but into the state's general treasury. MHANYS believes this is unacceptable, and we cannot afford to miss another opportunity to protect forthcoming opioid settlement monies.

The New York State Legislature passed this bill unanimously in just three months underscoring a collective urgency to protect this crucial funding. MHANYS agrees and urges the Governor to sign S.7194/A.6395-B into law immediately.

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