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## **Memorandum in Support**

S.2359 (Brouk)/A.2944 (Clark)

*AN ACT* directing the commissioner of mental health to establish a maternal mental health workgroup to study and issue recommendations related to maternal mental health and perinatal and postpartum mood and anxiety disorders; and providing for the repeal of such provision upon expiration thereof

The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) strongly supports S.2359/A.2944, which would establish a maternal mental health workgroup within the Office of Mental Health (OMH) to study and issue recommendations that will improve the impacts that maternal mental health disorders have on women and birthing people, children and families.

Maternal mental health conditions are the most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth, affecting 1 in 5 women and childbearing people during the perinatal timeframe (during pregnancy and first year postpartum). Left undetected and untreated, these illnesses can have long-term negative impact on parents, babies, family, and society. Unfortunately, three quarters of individuals who screen at-risk for postpartum depression will not be treated. The situation is even more dire for women of color who experience postpartum depression at a rate of close to 38 percent compared with approximately 13 to 19 percent for all postpartum women. It is estimated that over half of the instances of maternal depression in women of color go unreported. Further, current maternal mental health screening tools fail to account for social determinants of health that disproportionately impact black and brown women, as well as in nonbinary and transmasculine gestational parents.

Contributing factors to maternal mental health conditions are complex and multivariate including bodily and hormonal changes as well as mental health factors that also impact the health and wellbeing of mothers' babies. The formation of a maternal mental health workgroup in OMH that includes the participation of the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the Department of Health (DOH) as well as other relevant stakeholders would help to assure a holistic and multidisciplinary approach for generating recommendations and directing policy decisions.

This legislation would be particularly impactful if passed in concert with S.2039/A.2870, which would create and apply maternal mental health screening tools. Taken together these proposals represent a well-rounded approach for responding to the challenges of maternal mental health for all women as well as disproportionately impacted black and brown women and nonbinary and transmasculine gestational parents.

For these reasons MHANYS strongly supports S.2359/A.2944 and recommends that the Legislature pass this bill into law.

**Healthy Minds For A Healthy New York**

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