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Memorandum in Support

S.2838 (Breslin)

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to the New York state masters-in-mental health incentive scholarship program

The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) supports S.2838 (Breslin), which would create a masters-in-mental health incentive scholarship program in New York and help address the shortage of mental health practitioners in the state.

A growing demand for mental health services, compounded by the COVID-19 Pandemic, is surpassing the capacity to meet the mounting need. The National Council for Mental Wellbeing reported that 77% of counties in the United States are experiencing a severe shortage of mental health providers. Over one-third of Americans live in areas lacking mental health professionals. This disparity results in longer wait times to secure licensed therapists or worse, an inability to secure treatment at all. The inability to secure help for mental illnesses profoundly impacts every area of peoples' lives. No treatment and delayed treatment can lead to unemployment, school dropout, strained and broken relationships, substance misuse, legal problems, and most tragically -- suicide.

Mental health provider shortages translate into specific shortfalls in licensed clinicians. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimates that by 2025, the U.S. will have a shortage of 10,470 marriage and family therapists, 26,930 mental health counselors, 48,540 social workers, and 78,050 school counselors. New York State Education data presented in the bill sponsor's memo points out that New York is no exception, projecting critical shortages in mental health professionals despite year-to-year increases in the licensed professions in New York's workforce. Strategies to meet these shortages are desperately needed, especially because the demand for mental health professionals is projected to increase during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from August 2020 to February 2021, the percentage of adults with recent symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders increased from 36.4% to 41.5%, and the percent of those reporting unmet mental health care needs increased from 9.2% to 11.7%.

S.2838 takes a creative, and we believe, promising approach to meeting the growing demand for mental health services in our state. Traditionally large numbers of undergraduate psychology majors testify to a high interest in mental health academics. The psychology major is the fourth most popular college major. Unfortunately, most of these students will not pursue post graduate work in the field. S.2838 offers a means and incentive for improving these odds.

For all of the aforementioned reasons MHANYS urges the Legislature to pass S.2838.

Healthy Minds For A Healthy New York

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