



CC

Sebrina Barrett, Executive Director
sebrina@aclnys.org



Allegra Schorr, President
aschorr@compa-ny.org



Paige Pierce, CEO
ppierce@ftrnys.org



Glenn Liebman, CEO
gliebman@mhany.org



Matthew Shapira, Senior Director
matthew@naminy.org



Harvey Rosenthal, CEO
harveyr@rightsandrecovery.org



Jackie Negri, Director
jackienegrillc@gmail.com



Maria Cristalli, Chair, Board of Directors
info@ccbhny.org



Lauri Cole, Executive Director
lauri@nyscouncil.org



Jihoon Kim, President & CEO
jkim@iunity.org



Pascale Leone, Executive Director
pleone@shnny.org

Behavioral Health Advocacy Organizations Response to COLA Proposal in SFY 2024-25 One House Bills 3.12.24

Earlier today, the Senate and Assembly both introduced their one-house bills. We are pleased that both houses made it a priority to support a 3.2% Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA). We are very appreciative that you have both been strong champions of COLA over the last several years, in recognition of the rising cost of keeping the doors open to community-based organizations who support New Yorkers in need of quality addiction and mental health services.

However, we are very concerned about the budget language around the COLA that is very prescriptive and clear in its intent to support non-executive staff of agencies impacted by the COLA. **As a reminder, the purpose of the COLA is to improve recruitment and retention of our workforce, as well as provide for inflationary increases.** Lack of COLA, and its flexibility, has created serious operational and workforce pressures. Operational costs are essential to keeping programs open, and if doors close, staff will lose their jobs.

Providers want to pay their staff a living wage. While we support our workforce tremendously as evidenced by past COLA implementation by providers, **we do not support this existing language** for several reasons:

- 1) Flexibility of the COLA is necessary to cover rising operational costs (energy, insurance, transportation, maintenance, food, technology, etc.) **AND** provide salary increases for the workforce.
- 2) Implementation of the bifurcated nature of such a request makes it very difficult for state agencies to implement administratively. During the Cuomo administration, there were years where some positions received a COLA while others did not. This delayed the process for distributing the funding to the community-based agencies. As a result, much needed funding did not go out the door for almost a year in some cases.

For these reasons, we strongly support the enactment of a permanent COLA, tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). Currently, the COLA tied to the July 2023 Consumer Price Index (CPI-U), is 3.2%. **We urge both the Assembly and Senate to eliminate the Article 7 language and include the 3.2% COLA without any contingencies.**

Sincerely,

Harvey Rosenthal, The Alliance for Rights and Recovery (formerly NYAPRS)
Sebrina Barrett, Executive Director, Association for Community Living
Allegra Schorr, President, Coalition of Medication-Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates of New York State (COMPA)
Paige Pierce, Chief Executive Officer, Families Together in NYS
Jihoon Kim, CEO, InUnity Alliance
Glenn Liebman, Chief Executive Officer, Mental Health Association in New York State
Sharon Horton, Executive Director, NAMI-NYS
Jackie Negri, Executive Director, New York State Care Management Coalition
Maria Cristalli, Chairperson, New York State Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health
Lauri Cole, Executive Director, New York State Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
Pascale Leone, Executive Director, The Supporting Housing Network of New York

Behavioral Health Advocates is comprised of 11 statewide organizations that have come together as an ad hoc group representing adult and children service providers, families, peers, and other stakeholders to achieve common goals within the behavioral health sector,