

## [NYAPRS Enews] Long-Term Fixes Needed to Aid People with Mental Illness; Brouk Introduces COLA Legislation

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on behalf of

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*NYAPRS Note: NYAPRS and MHANYS are urging that mental health public policy and funding decisions must focus on promoting proven and emerging voluntary models of engagement and support and strengthening our workforce and to eject the current focus on reactive approaches that are derived from an unjustified connections with violence. Accordingly, we and our many colleagues greatly welcome NYS Senate Mental Health Committee Chair Samra Brouk's newly released bill to require an annual COLA for our workforce (see below) and are backing an 8.5% COLA and a \$500 million investment in the final 2023-34 state budget agreement.*

*Please welcome NYAPRS new Public Policy Director Luke Sikinyi (see video link at <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/central-ny/ny-state-of-politics/2022/12/14/advocates-long-term-fixes-needed-to-aid-people-with-mental-illness->).*

### **New York Advocates: Long-Term Fixes Needed to Aid People with Mental Illness**

By Nick Reisman City Of Albany Spectrum News December 14, 2022

It's a plan from New York City Mayor Eric Adams he says is meant to keep the streets safer and provide help for people who are struggling: Involuntary confinement and treatment of people with a mental illness.

But mental health advocates are pushing back on the involuntary confinement of people with mental illnesses, arguing that alternatives exist.

Adams this month defended the policy in an interview with NY1's Mornings on 1.

"We are walking past our fellow New Yorkers that we know cannot make the decision of taking care of themselves to the point where they can't meet their basic needs," he said.

Longtime mental health advocate Harvey Rosenthal calls it the wrong approach.

"We won't think it's the right way to engage people," Rosenthal said. "We don't think it lasts. We think it's traumatizing to people."

Rosenthal is calling for alternatives to forced confinement that would lead to people voluntarily seeking treatment.

"We know so many ways of how to engage people voluntarily," Rosenthal said. So to go backwards as the mayor is doing with more police, more forced treatment, is exactly the wrong way to go."

Luke Sikinyi of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services said programs like ones in place elsewhere in New York state can be models, including so-called inset teams in Westchester County.

"We're seeing that there are people willing to take help. It's just how you reach them," he said. "So instead of forcing people to get help, we think there are ways of reaching them and getting to voluntarily take services."

The Mental Health Association of New York's Glenn Liebman said there needs to be broader fixes, including an expansion of general hospital beds across the state.

"What happens at the end of the day? There's no place for people to go," Liebman said. "The emergency rooms are flooded."

And in the short term, advocates will be looking to the state budget process in Albany and raises for people who provide direct care to those struggling with mental illness.

But advocates also do not want to recreate the problems associated with large-scale psychiatric facilities for people with mental illnesses. In the long term, housing will be needed.

"You need to have housing. Housing is the key to all this," Liebman said. "You need to have community services. We all know the right recipe here."

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### **New Brouk Bill to Establish Annual COLAs for Mental Health Workforce**

*Cost of living adjustments aimed at bolstering New York's shrinking mental health workforce*

*December 15, 2022*

**ALBANY, NY** - Senator Samra Brouk (SD-55) introduced legislation today to establish annual cost of living adjustments (COLAs) for New York's mental health workforce. The bill, S9615, would require the state to issue pay increases on an annual basis, with the amount of the increases being tethered to the consumer price index, so that wages increase alongside inflation.

At a time when officials at every level of government are drawing attention to the importance of mental health, Senator Brouk knows that no meaningful change can exist until New York invests in its mental health workforce. New York must have systems in place for those who independently seek mental health care, and those systems are contingent on a successful workforce.

Senator Brouk has established a record as a champion for wage increases for New York's increasingly vital mental health workforce. In 2021, Senator Brouk secured a 1% COLA for state mental health workers, followed by a 5.4% COLA in 2022. Prior to Brouk's advocacy, employees of state-funded mental health agencies had not received a wage adjustment in twelve years.

Stagnant wages and the resulting turnover have resulted in significant challenges for New York's mental health workforce, with some programs in the state seeing vacancy rates as high as 40%. To that end, New York's human services workforce is 80% women, and roughly half are women of color, making pay equity in this sector a racial and gender justice issue as well.

There is a growing need for a quality mental health workforce, with both children and adults needing mental health supports more than ever before. The United State Surgeon General, as well as the American Academy of Pediatrics have issued warnings, as well as declared a national emergency regarding youth and adolescent mental health. Further, The National Safety Council, released a report finding that 50% of large employers have observed an increase in mental health or impairment-related absences and incidents among their staff, and anticipates long-term effects to employees' mental health following the pandemic.

Senator Samra Brouk said, "Workers in the mental health field perform incredibly challenging jobs on a daily basis, and are often struggling to get by due to stagnant wages, increased hours, and burnout. I'm proud to have introduced legislation that will take the guesswork out of determining cost of living adjustments each fiscal year, and will finally codify the wage increases that these essential workers are entitled to receive."

Glenn Leibman, CEO of the Mental Health Health Association of New York State said, "As the mental health crisis worsens, community agencies need to do everything we can to recruit and retain a quality workforce. We are already facing high turnover and vacancy rates that dramatically impact the ability to provide services and supports for people with behavioral health needs. Investing in an 8.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) based on the CPI will help provided that needed investment for the community. We thank Senator Brouk for her leadership and ongoing commitment to help support a COLA in this coming year's budget.

Sebrina Barrett, Executive Director, Association for Community Living said, "For years, mental health housing providers have come hat in hand, urging that the statutory COLA be funded only to be denied and watch inflation deplete dollars desperately needed to serve vulnerable New Yorkers. This bill would ensure that funding keeps pace with inflation, giving providers reassurance that they will be able to keep their doors open, and families the comfort of knowing their loved ones will remain secure, with a roof over their heads, and supported by the services they require for recovery."

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*New York State Senator Samra Brouk (pronounced Sahm-ra Brew-k) represents the incredibly diverse 55th Senate District, stretching from the southern shores of Lake Ontario, through Rochester's Neighborhood of the Arts, and south to Finger Lakes wine country. It includes Victor, East Bloomfield, West Bloomfield, Richmond, Bristol, South Bristol, Canadice, and Naples in Ontario County and Rush, Mendon, Pittsford, Perinton, Penfield, East Rochester, and Irondequoit, plus the east side of the City of Rochester in Monroe County. Senator Brouk serves as the Chair of the*

*Mental Health Committee and sits on the Health, Education, Elections, Aging, and Alcoholism and Substance Abuse committees.*