

Briefs Coalition

June 19, 1998

The
Coalition
of Voluntary
Mental Health
Agencies, Inc.



A SEMI-MONTHLY UPDATE ON COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH IN NEW YORK

Albany tango not over

The flurry of legislative action at the end of the session may prove fruitful for the mental health community. As of 2:00 p.m. today, it appears that the legislature will pass an extension of the Community Reinvestment Act and might pass a COLA for mental health workers.

Although the Assembly unanimously passed a five year extension of the Reinvestment act on May 15, the Senate failed to act on a companion bill. Eventually a two and a half year extension compromise was worked out very late in the process (A11329 and S7770) and was endorsed by the Governor. The Senate passed S7770 late at night on June 17. The Assembly is expected to pass the extender today. Governor Pataki is expected to sign the legislation when it reaches his desk.

On June 15 the Rules Committee introduced identical COLA bills in both houses. Separate bills were introduced to provide COLA to mental health workers, mental retardation and developmental disabilities workers, child welfare workers and alcoholism and substance abuse workers. All eight (four in each house) of the bills provide 2.5% adjustments, retroactive to April 1, 1998 that begin with the lowest paid workers and move up until the money runs out. Unfortunately, it appears that the mental health bill will not reimburse agencies that provided a COLA prior to April 1 of this year, nor will it provide a COLA for non-contract agencies. This is a late developing problem. The Senate passed the legislation on June 18th, we hope the Assembly will follow suit today and that the Governor will go along.

On a more positive front legislative leaders and the Governor have agreed to expand Child Health Plus. Benefits for both in- and out-patient mental health care will be expanded and nearly 50,000 more children will be covered.

In less encouraging news, it appears that our legislators will go home to campaign without passing any form of mental health parity. □

Council presses Albany

The New York City Council Health Committee held hearings on Wednesday, June 17 to debate the merits of two Resolutions proposed by Councilman Morton Povman of Queens. Resolution 34-A urges the State legislature to pass Assemblyman James Brennan's A8315-B, which would create mental health parity in New York State. Resolution 35-A urges the State legislature to extend the Community Mental Health Reinvestment Act for five more years. The Coalition's Joshua Rubin testified in favor of both proposals. Resolution 35-A was passed unanimously by the Committee members present, 34-A was tabled until a later date. □

Help Wanted

The Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies seeks an Office Manager. The ideal candidate is a highly organized self-starter who can provide wrap-around support in a fast-paced environment. Good computer skills are a must. Bookkeeping skills are a BIG plus. Salary in the high 20's, commensurate with experience. Excellent benefits. Resume and cover letter to Human Resources Director, 120 W. 57th Street, Suite 1014, NYC 10019. *Women, people of color, people with disabilities and other minorities are encouraged to apply.* □

City Council asserts itself

The mood in the City Council chambers was festive on June 16 as members voted along party lines to override Mayor Giuliani's vetoes of \$296 million from the City budget passed by the Council on June 5. Included in the veto overrides were \$500,000 for forensic mental health services, \$500,000 for immigrant children's mental health services and \$373,100 in Council Initiatives for mental health services, as well as \$1 million for alcoholism treatment.

The Mayor may impound the City's funds and the FY1999 City budget will perhaps be decided in court. The Coalition hopes the Mayor does not take this drastic step that cannot undo the specific tax cuts to which he is so opposed. □

Upcoming Events

- June 23 Managed Care Technical Assistance - Operating systems for clinical and financial records in NYANA auditorium, 9:30 a.m.
- June 25 Membership Meeting at CVMHA, 3:30 p.m.
- July 6 Coalition closed for Independence Day
- July 15 Deadline for Children's SNP RFI responses
- July 23 Managed Care Technical Assistance - Update on new legislation and regulations re: SNPs and MCOs in NYANA auditorium, 9:30 a.m.