

**Remarks of Jamin R. Sewell
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“Oversight - Thrive NYC: A Mental Health Roadmap for All”

January 28, 2016

Good Afternoon, Chairman Cohen and members of the NYC Council Committee on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and Disability Services.

I am Jamin R. Sewell, Counsel & Managing Director for Policy and Advocacy of The Coalition Of Behavioral Health Agencies. The Coalition is the umbrella advocacy organization of New York's mental health and substance abuse agencies that serve more than 350,000 clients/consumers in neighborhoods throughout New York. Our member agencies are on the ground, front-line safety net providers. We treat some of the most needy individuals, including those with dual diagnoses of mental health and substance abuse problems. Our providers serve the homeless and the formerly incarcerated as well as victims of trauma and abuse. Members serve the entire age spectrum, from early childhood through geriatric and all ages in between. These agencies are in every Council District and neighborhood in the city.

On behalf of our Chief Executive Officer, Phillip Saperia, who sincerely regrets that he cannot attend today, and the Coalition Board, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present our thoughts on Thrive NYC: A Mental Health Roadmap for All. We congratulate the City Administration, the Mayor and the First Lady for spotlighting mental health and substance use issues which often are ignored or stigmatized. We are also pleased that an array of services are proposed to meet serious needs in the city. We strongly agree that the children, families and adults who live with mental health and substance use disorders need assessment and help.

ThriveNYC offers a significant investment and gives major attention to the problems and the populations it is designed to address. The Roadmap to Mental Health for All is proposed as a momentous and valued supplement to the under-funded and very stretched array of community-based services currently supported by the State and City. The Coalition and its members in every local community are eager to be supportive to our City leadership as the new initiative rolls out.

As you are aware, the Roadmap contains a package of 54 initiatives costing \$850 million over four years. Its aim is to hire 400 mental health clinicians for high-need communities as well as providing mental health training to a quarter million New Yorkers. All very positive steps.

We do have some concerns about the Mental Health Roadmap and its total mental health focus in terminology and overall presentation. In so limiting the language to

“mental health” we are concerned that there is insufficient recognition of substance use. Substance abuse is a distinct set of disorders, sometimes comorbid with mental health disorders and sometimes existing separately. We are concerned that labeling this a “Mental Health” initiative and using the slogan “It’s all about mental health,” risks further stigmatizing substance abuse, which are an already stigmatized group of disorders. While many in our field, refer to Behavioral Health as the accepted term to incorporate and describe both mental health and addiction issues we have been told by the Administration that it is a professional term which the general public does not recognize. We recommend terminology that would simply describe people with mental health and substance use problems, not trying to lump all clients under a single heading.

Another concern is about how the new programs will interface with New York State Office of Mental Health and Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services, who currently fund most of the current programs, directly, through Medicaid or through local assistance. These funding streams have considerable history and have been in existence for many years. Although Medicaid funding may slip into managed care, we hope OMH and OASAS will continue to oversee and monitor those programs.

We also wonder how the Thrive NYC and Mental Health Roadmap programs will interact with and relate to the new Medicaid managed care environment and new funding/programs like DSRIP, Health Homes and Home and Community Based Services? I think it very important that they do so because the CBO behavioral health safety net sector is very focused on implementing these initiatives. Historically, New York City has played a leading role alongside New York State to fund behavioral health programs and supplement some of the programming gaps. That relationship of City/State cooperation was critical. We hope that cooperation and programmatic integration will continue.

It is our impression that the ThriveNYC initiatives are directed at populations with serious behavioral health disorders, as well as those with more mainstream problems. Certainly, many homeless and criminal justice-involved people will have severe behavioral health problems. The resources to deal with these individuals are strained and may impact on the City's ability to direct people to care. How will the new initiatives relate to the existing safety net service system? We are dismayed that this complex initiative was developed without engaging, throughout the conceptualizing and planning, our experienced “legs-on-the ground” safety net provider community. We wonder why the Mayor’s budget proposes to route 15,000 units of supportive housing through the Human Resources Administration. Why isn’t the City routing these beds through the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene? This Department historically oversees supportive housing and its critical support services. It has the knowledge and resources to supervise supportive housing for people with mental illness and substance abuse disorders. With all due respect, that same expertise is not available at HRA.

Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) are in the process of assuming a lead role in funding behavioral health services in NYC. It would be useful for the Mayor's Office to engage MCOs in the ThriveNYC implementation process and see how they will interact

and participate as they assume a greater role in the funding and oversight of behavioral health services that could and should link with Roadmap initiatives.

A few other questions:

1) The funding for the Roadmap is available for 4 years. How will these new services be sustained after that period?

2) ThriveNYC proposes to embed Licensed Clinical Social Workers in 130 Community Schools and all contracted Family Shelters, how will supervision be conducted unless the clinicians are connected with a community-based provider? Linkages to community based providers will be critical to the success of this initiative, but how those linkages will occur is not clear. How will those providers be chosen? Will they have contracts with multiple agencies or just with DOHMH? How will the Roadmap staff be paid for their services and how will these professionals relate to existing staff. Will they be paid through the community based agencies. How will they be supervised? These are critical questions that refer to necessary care integration.

Finally, the Roadmap routes funds through DFTA, DOE and HRA, as well as DOHMH (particularly its Division of Mental Hygiene), the most knowledgeable and experienced of the governmental bodies in mental health and substance use delivery and care. We hope that the City will make it very clear, by creating structures of oversight and authority that identifies the Division of Mental Hygiene as the lead agency in this endeavor. They bring the knowledge and experience that can make the initiative succeed.

Despite our fears and recommendations, we want The Roadmap to succeed. It has the promise of bringing new resources to our underresourced field. We hope that the partnership of all the Roadmap agencies with our community based providers and with the leadership of The Division of Mental Hygiene will realize the goals for this ambitious project. The Coalition and its members are eager to assist the Administration and the Council on its implementation.

Thank you for the opportunity to give our thoughts on this important and timely topic.