



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Shirley L. Huntley

2/14/2012: Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Budget Hearing

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News From New York State

Senator Shirley L. Huntley

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****PRESS RELEASE****

(Albany, New York) - On February 14, 2012 the New York State Senate held the Mental Hygiene budget hearing based on the Governor's budget proposal. Testimony was heard from a myriad of individuals and organizations regarding the overall budget of Mental Hygiene, as well as specific provisions and actions within it. The Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), Office of Mental Health (OMH), and Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) all received increases of 1% or less in their respective budgets. Yet, one of the main discussions during the hearing was about the closure of Kingsborough Psychiatric Center in Brooklyn.

I found it troubling that Kingsborough was closed without a year's notice, that is required under a state Mental Hygiene law, and that additionally the Department of Budget estimates no State savings from the closure of this facility. This glaring lack of community notice and input is eerily similar to when three hospitals in Southeast Queens, which encompasses parts of my district, closed down without giving the

community a chance to voice their grievances nor provide them alternative healthcare options.

I asked the Commissioner of the Office of Mental Health (OMH), Michael Hogan, how would patients be able to receive proper mental health and inpatient care, while having to travel to State Island, from Brooklyn, a trip that can take 2 ½ hours. I also conveyed to him how this closure would not only affect someone's mental health care, but also their wallet if they went to Staten Island by automobile, toll fares would be \$14. The closing of this facility will unfortunately reinforce the idea that communities of color are not provided nor have the availability of quality healthcare compared to other communities.

Another key component discussed in the budget hearing was the lack of Cost Of Living Allowance (COLA) increase, especially for direct support staff at facilities or homes that care for those with disabilities. The COLA increase was promised in last year's budget; however it was cut out once again. Both those with disabilities and the staff that cares for and helps them rely on these COLA increases due to the fact that the cost of living and inflation and rise every year, proving it harder to purchase certain items, and staff forced to work a second job or quit altogether.

Since the budget deficit was 3.5 billion compared to last year's total of 10 billion not as many programs or agencies suffered severe cuts. For all the Mental Hygiene Agencies, All Funds spending increased by only 1 percent, or from 8 billion 94 million to 8 billion and 178 millions.