



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

Ortt Outraged by State-Funded, Booze-Filled Weekend

ROBERT G. ORTT May 22, 2015

| ISSUE: **MENTAL HEALTH, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

Audit Shows Mental Health Provider Submitted More Than \$150,000 in Questionable Reimbursements

LOCKPORT - State Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda) today blasted a Queens non-profit as well as the state Office of Mental Health (OMH) after an audit showed gross misuse of taxpayer funds. An **audit** revealed that Promoting Specialized Care and Health (PSCH), which has a five-year contract with OMH for \$30 million to provide services to individuals with mental disabilities and substance abuse, spent more than \$150,000 on inappropriate expenses. That included nearly \$32,000 on a high-end conference at a Long Island resort including alcohol, cruises, and gifts.

“This is offensive to taxpayers who expect government to help addicts overcome substance abuse, not to fund booze cruises,” said Sen. Ortt. “This is disrespectful to the selfless, tireless staffers providing critical mental health services; they worked for nearly a decade without a cost of living increase while their colleagues at PSCH enjoy a \$63,000 retreat. And, this is heart-breaking to any family member who has been told that New York cannot provide disability services, but the state can pick up the tab for a \$6,312 dinner.”

Ortt serves as chairman of the New York State Senate Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. He is calling on the OMH to closely scrutinize its reimbursements with organizations such as PSCH, whose last CEO (Ralph Farkas) resigned following an Attorney General investigation into improperly diverting state and non-profit resources to a charity Farkas controlled. Ortt said he has been disappointed to see years of neglect within the mental health and developmental disability communities and that he is considering follow-up actions.

“Ask any service provider working on the front lines; ask anyone whose family member is affected by substance abuse, mental illness, or mental disabilities and they’ll tell you the same thing – funds and resources are lacking,” said Sen. Ortt. “So to see this blatant misuse of taxpayer funds and despicable disregard for those in need is especially disgusting. The state clearly needs to do a better job monitoring these types of contracts and expenses. But I would also appeal to PSCH’s donors to reconsider their private generosity to an organization with such a poor record.”