

Testimony for Joint Legislative Hearing of the 2012-13 Health Budget

From the Empire State Pride Agenda

Prepared by Jonathan Lang, Director of Government Projects and Community Development

Despite the significant gains that have been made in New York State to support the health and human services needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) New Yorkers, there are still many unmet needs that are not being addressed. The steady erosion of public support from the State continues to have a damaging effect on the ability of service providers to maintain a fragile network of cost-effective, life saving preventative services across New York State.

Since 1994, the New York State LGBT Health and Human Services (the Network) -- a coalition of nearly 60 service providers -- has worked to decrease health disparities and promote healthier behaviors for some of New York's most overlooked and underserved communities. As the coordinator of the Network, the Empire State Pride Agenda works alongside these organizations to increase their capacity and build a statewide infrastructure capable of meeting the needs of over 800,000 New Yorkers every year.

From primary health and wellness services to mental health treatment and family counseling, LGBT-serving organizations are utilizing every tool at their disposal in order to make a difference in their communities. Through collaboration and resource-sharing, the Network is providing LGBT culturally competent services in all 62 counties of New York State. The importance of culturally competent service delivery cannot be overstated. In a 2009 study commissioned by the Empire State Pride Agenda, 40 percent of respondents reported that a lack of culturally competent providers was a barrier to getting the healthcare that LGBT people need. In a population that experiences significantly higher levels of health disparity, access to providers who know and understand our communities is a major concern.

Funding from the State has provided a critical lifeline of support for LGBT health and human services. The 2010-2011 Annual Report of the NYS LGBT Health and Human Services Network recently reported that 28 percent of Network organizations rely on State funding for more than half of their operating budgets. This year, Governor Cuomo has continued his commitment to LGBT health and human services with \$5.26M in his 2012-13 Executive Budget, but overall support from state government has dwindled from its highpoint of \$8M in 2007. The attrition of public support from Albany continues to adversely impact LGBT service providers all across New York State, and has led many service providers to make drastic decisions in order to keep their doors open. Twenty six percent of Network organizations reported having laid off or eliminated full or part-time staff member positions in the past year and 26 percent of Network organizations reported having to decrease their hours of operation or programming.

LGBT New Yorkers understand that New York still faces economic uncertainties that continue to challenge the State. However, New York's small investment of public funds and its decades-long partnership with LGBT service providers has produced a nationally-renowned model of service delivery that continues to produce tangible results. New York must continue its obligation to support some of its most vulnerable populations. The need has never been greater and the LGBT community is looking to its elected representatives in Albany to do the right thing and remain a strong and steadfast partner in the fight to reduce health disparities for LGBT New Yorkers.