

TESTIMONY OF
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Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Licensed Creative Arts Therapist
As a representative of the Licensed Creative Arts Therapists (LCAT) Advocacy Coalition

2024 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
February 13, 2024

My name is Drena Fagen. I live in Cold Spring in the Hudson Valley. I am here representing the Licensed Creative Therapists Advocacy Coalition and the 2116 LCATs living and working in New York State. I am a co-owner of a mental health therapy practice that employs 20 psychotherapists, serves over 300 New Yorkers weekly, and has operated since 2009.

For nearly 17 years, the field of Creative Arts Therapies has been licensed and providing essential individual, group, and family psychotherapy in a wide variety of inpatient & outpatient settings across New York State, including OMH operated PROS and CORE programs, Article 31 and 32 clinics, substance abuse treatment outpatient clinics, IOPs, professional corporations licensed by New York State to provide psychotherapy, CBOs, non-profits, medical hospitals, corrections facilities, psychiatric hospitals and Charter Schools

I am here today because New York has a mental health supply and demand problem and this State Budget can help fix that problem by adding language to expand access to psychotherapy for New Yorkers who rely on Medicaid for healthcare. Adding 2116 LCATs to the Medicaid Provider list will not increase costs, instead, it will increase is the supply of therapists who can immediately fill workplace vacancies and provide already existing psychotherapeutic services in the many facilities in which we provide care.

Last month, I received a call from a care coordinator at MVP Healthcare asking if I could provide Art Therapy for a 6 year old child client with Medicaid coverage, for which I am an in-network provider as an LCSW. I had no availability, but there were 4 therapists in my practice (out of 20) who did have openings, but they could not see this child in need because they have the LCAT license....and this MVP rep was specifically seeking Art Therapy services.

In December of 2021, Governor Hochul signed into law Chapter 819 - that passed overwhelmingly in both the Senate and Assembly. It allowed all mental health practitioners licensed under Article 163 of the State Education Law to be eligible for coverage under the Medicaid program. February of 2022, the Governor signed a "chapter amendment," Chapter 97 to specifically exclude LCATs and LPs, allowing for only 2 of the 4 Masters level licenses to be included on the Medicaid Provider List.

Since these 2022 actions, the need for licensed mental health practitioners in our state to provide desperately needed psychotherapy has only grown - especially for children and teens **That is why I am here today to request the 2025 State Budget add licensed creative arts therapists (LCAT) to the Medicaid Provider List.**

As you all know, since 2006, Creative Arts Therapists have been licensed under Article 163 of the State Education Law, which created four mental health practitioner licenses – mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, creative arts therapists and psychoanalysts. Like their Article 163 counterparts, licensed creative arts therapists complete 60-credit Master's degrees approved by Department of Education. Curriculums include psychotherapeutic approaches, evidenced based trauma treatments, psychological assessment, diagnosis and treatment planning, and addictions and substance abuse treatment.

The CPT (procedure) codes for the psychotherapy sessions provided by an LCAT are the same codes used when a psychotherapy session is provided by an LCSW, psychologist or any other licensed mental health practitioner. Commercial health insurance plans including Cigna, United Health Care and Healthfirst have covered LCATs as providers of psychotherapy since 2008.

LCATs are integrated into health systems and mental health care across New York State – serving children, teenagers, adults and elderly. **Very importantly, it should be noted, Licensed Creative Arts Therapists are uniquely qualified to work with refugees, immigrants, and non-English speakers due to the breadth of non-verbal, inclusive and culturally appropriate arts-based interventions used.**

A recent survey of 556 LCATs working across New York State found that: 27% work with refugees, 65.3% work with immigrants, & 49.1% work with non-English speakers.

Our state's 2000+ licensed creative arts therapists are a critical component of our mental health system. We need to allow our most underserved Medicaid population access to their psychotherapeutic care. **This is not a new service**, but rather the same psychotherapy provided by all licensed practitioners - simply delivered differently. Adding LCATs to the Medicaid Provider List would improve access to much-needed care during our state's mental health and substance use disorder crisis.

On behalf of the Licensed Creative Therapists Advocacy Coalition, I respectfully request language be added to the State Budget to include licensed creative arts therapists (LCAT) to the Medicaid Provider List.

Thank you.