

## **New York State Legislative Joint Budget Hearing: Mental Hygiene Testimony of Friends of Recovery- New York (FOR-NY)**

Good afternoon, Chairpersons Krueger, Pretlow, Brouk and Simon,

As well as the distinguished persons of the Senate and Assembly. Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to testify before you on this important topic.

My name is Dr. Angelia Smith-Wilson and I am the Executive Director of Friends of Recovery-New York (FOR-NY), a member in recovery, and an ally to the recovery movement, I am honored to be invited to testify and examine the FY 2025-2026 Budget and its potential impact on New York State's recovery community.

Friends of Recovery-New York represents individuals and families living in recovery from addiction, those who have lost loved ones to addiction, and those otherwise impacted by substance use disorders (SUD). The stigma and shame surrounding addiction have historically prevented millions from seeking help. FOR-NY is committed to breaking down the barriers created by negative public perception, which leads to discrimination and policies that obstruct access to essential recovery services, including addiction treatment, healthcare, housing, education, and employment.

FOR-NY is also dedicated to building a strong statewide infrastructure through local Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) and a robust peer workforce that provides vital support for people in recovery and others in need. Our network of RCOs is deeply committed to evidence-based, life-saving practices that support individuals seeking recovery, ensuring they have the resources and support to succeed.

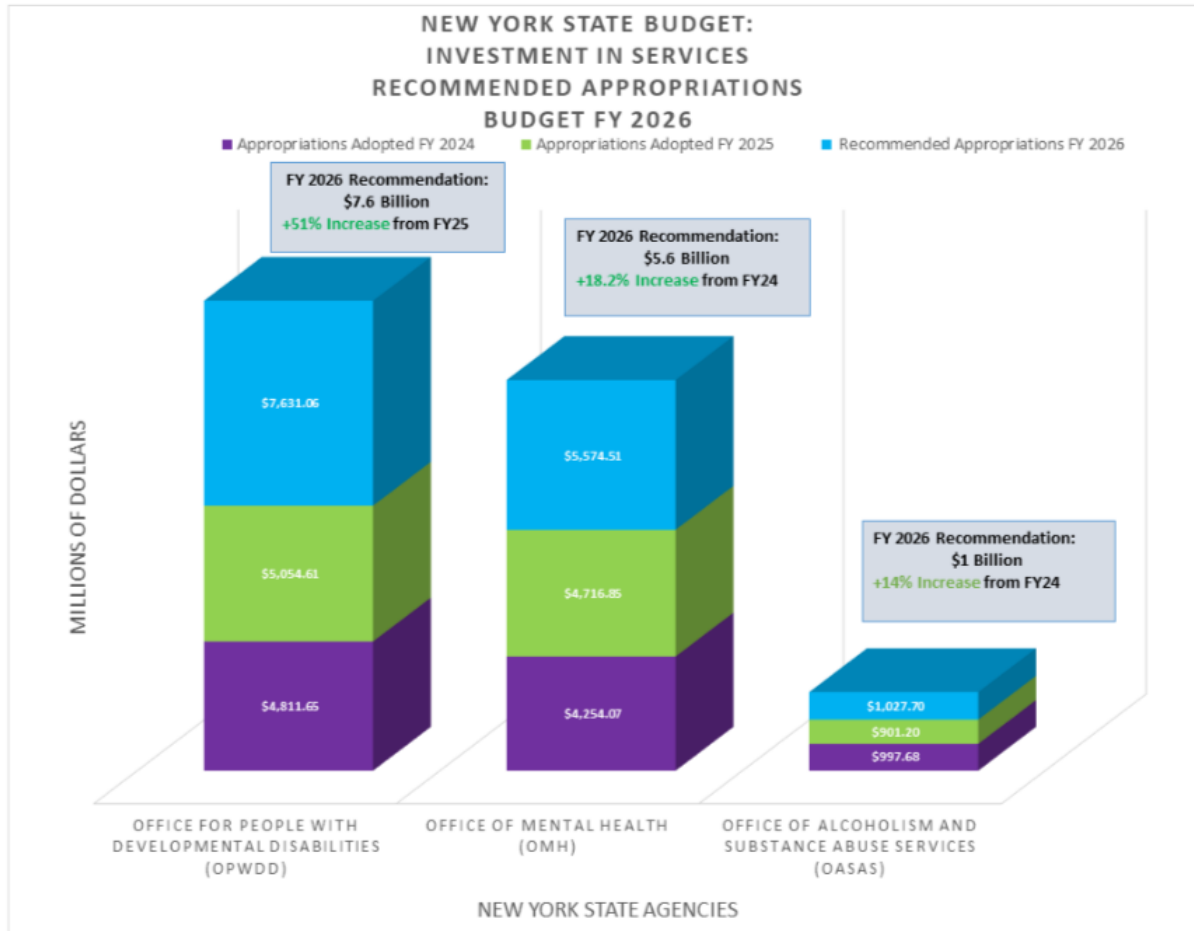
### **The Impact of Substance Use on New York State**

In 2023, New York tragically lost nearly 15,000 lives to substance use, including 6,330 overdose deaths and 8,050 fatalities related to excessive alcohol use. Overdose is the leading cause of death for Americans under the age of 50, and in New York, overdose deaths have risen by more than 200% over the last five years. The broader economic burden of this crisis, from healthcare costs to criminal justice expenses and lost productivity, now reaches into the trillions of dollars. Yet, the addiction service delivery system remains under-resourced, struggling with ongoing workforce shortages that compromise care.

### **Funding Shortfalls and Challenges**

The New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) continues to be funded at a significantly lower level compared to other agencies serving similar populations, such as OPWDD and OMH. On average, OASAS' budget is only 17% of the budgets of these agencies. In response, we are advocating for an additional \$1 billion investment in OASAS to better

support recovery services and address the growing needs of individuals in recovery across the state.



Currently, the recovery community relies on federal funding, such as the Substance Use and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) SOR and SAPT block grants, which pass through OASAS to support local programs. The only state funding available comes from the Opioid Settlement Fund. However, we at FOR-NY are deeply concerned about using these funds as a stop-gap measure to address New York’s budget deficit. Despite claims that New York is leading the nation in the distribution of these funds, the reality is troubling. Of the \$506,482,000 appropriated for the fund, approximately 60% — or \$290,201,000 — remains undisbursed. The same issue exists with the Opioid Stewardship Fund, further jeopardizing the financial stability of recovery programs.

We are increasingly concerned that these vital funds are not allocated in a timely or meaningful manner. Rather than supplementing the state’s budget for substance use services, they are often used to supplant existing resources. The lack of transparency in the distribution and use of these funds further exacerbates the problem. Immediate action is needed to ensure these resources are used effectively to address the opioid crisis and support recovery services.

## **Legislation and Advocacy for Permanent, Sustainable Funding**

In response to these issues, last year FOR-NY introduced legislation to allocate 10% of the Opioid Stewardship Fund toward recovery services, focusing on increasing transparency and ensuring the fund's permanence. While the bill passed the Senate unanimously (61-0), it unfortunately did not come up for a vote in the Assembly.

This year, FOR-NY has introduced the Overdose Prevention and Recovery Act (OPRA), which aims to ensure that at least 20% of funds from the Opioid Stewardship Fund are allocated to recovery services, with an additional 20% directed to the Department of Health for harm reduction services, including syringe service programs and drug user health hubs. The original law establishing the Opioid Stewardship Fund already earmarked recovery services as an appropriate use of these funds.

### **Key Points about OPRA:**

- **Permanent, Sustainable Funding for Recovery Services:** OPRA guarantees ongoing funding for recovery services, ensuring that individuals in recovery receive the support they need.
- **Opioid Stewardship Fund Overview:** The Fund currently holds \$200 million, created to hold opioid manufacturers and distributors accountable for their role in the addiction and overdose crisis.
- **Utilizing Existing Funds:** OPRA does not seek additional financial allocations but proposes dedicating 20% of the Fund — \$40 million — to recovery services through 2029.
- **Challenges Facing Recovery Services:** Recovery services are not reimbursable and depend heavily on precarious federal funding. If federal funding is reduced or lost, recovery centers across New York State face the risk of closure.
- **Making the Fund Permanent:** OPRA would make the Opioid Stewardship Fund permanent, building on Governor Hochul's advocacy for its permanency in last year's budget.
- **Increased Transparency:** OPRA ensures that funds will supplement, not supplant, existing resources, with increased transparency in their use.

### **Benefits of OPRA's Permanent and Sustainable Funding:**

1. **Expansion of Recovery Centers:** OPRA would enable the creation of more recovery centers statewide to meet local community needs, reduce isolation, and provide supportive environments for individuals in or considering recovery. We continue to advocate that each county in New York has at least one Recovery Community Organization (RCO), Recovery Community Outreach Center (RCOC), and Youth

Clubhouse, as well as a minimum of two Certified Recovery Peer Advocates and two Certified Family Support Navigators.

2. **Supportive Recovery Housing:** OPRA would invest in supportive housing for individuals in recovery.
3. **Increased Compensation for Essential Staff:** OPRA would fund salary increases for Certified Recovery Peer Advocates (CRPAs), Family Support Navigators (FSNs), Youth Peer Advocates, and other key staff in OASAS-licensed programs.
4. **Support for Community-Based Organizations:** OPRA would provide vital funding to community-based organizations, helping residents access care and serving as critical resources in their communities. Additionally, Request for Applications (RFAs) and Requests for Proposals (RFPs) should prioritize community-based organizations that lack reimbursement mechanisms, including RCOs, RCOCs, and Harm Reduction Organizations. To support smaller organizations, additional education and assistance with grant writing should be provided. Finally, increasing awareness around Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and reducing stigma within local communities must be central to our efforts.

In summary, OPRA will secure permanent, transparent, and sustainable funding for recovery services, ensuring that resources are directed toward building infrastructure, expanding recovery services, and addressing access issues across New York State.

### **Recovery Ready Workplaces (RRWs)**

The workplace plays a crucial yet often overlooked role in addressing the opioid crisis. In 2020, 70% of the 9.3 million people who misused prescription opioids were employed full or part-time. Ignoring substance use in the workplace costs workers, families, and employers, contributing to labor shortages and economic losses. From 2009 to 2015, New York lost an estimated 225,000 workers due to opioid misuse, resulting in a \$179.4 billion economic loss.

Employment is key to recovery, providing stability, purpose, and access to essential resources. Recovery Ready Workplaces (RRWs) recognize recovery as a strength, fostering an inclusive environment and reducing stigma. RRWs offer job accommodations, treatment access, and recovery resources, supporting employees in their journey to recovery.

Employers benefit from RRWs through improved job stability, productivity, and retention, while reducing absenteeism, disciplinary problems, and healthcare costs. Employers save an average of \$4,088 in turnover and replacement costs, and each employee in recovery saves the company up to \$8,500 per year compared to workers with untreated substance use disorders.

Establishing a Recovery Ready Workplace is a win-win — benefiting employers and employees while contributing positively to the broader community.

**In summary:**

- **Invest in OASAS** at levels comparable to OPWDD and OMH, specifically targeting recovery support services. Additionally, **disburse the \$290,201,000** currently undisbursed in the Opioid Settlement Fund in a swift and efficient manner.
- **Pass the Overdose Prevention and Recovery Act (OPRA)** (A.69 / S.55), which mandates that at least **20% of funds** from the Opioid Stewardship Fund be allocated to recovery services and supports, and **another 20%** to the Department of Health for harm reduction services, including syringe services and drug user health hubs. OPRA would also make the Fund permanent and increase transparency around its usage.
- **Pass the Recovery Ready Workplace Act** (A.521 / S.3740), which establishes workplace programs to both **prevent addiction** and **support recovery** in the workplace.

Thank you for your time and consideration.