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**“Nothing About Us,  
Without Us”**

**Testimony of Friends of Recovery New York  
(FOR-NY)**

**Joint Senate Task Force on Opioids Addiction and Overdose Prevention**

**November 15, 2019**

**Presented by:**

**Angelia Smith-Wilson EdD, MSW  
Executive Director  
Friends of Recovery New York  
(FOR-NY)**

I am Angelia Smith-Wilson and as the Executive Director of Friends of Recovery- New York and a family member and ally to the recovery movement, I am honored to be invited by Senator Harckham, Chair of the Senate Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse as well as Senators Carlucci and Rivera, Co-Chairs of the Senate Task Force to examine current approaches and consider new strategies for how New York responds to drug use and to the epidemic of overdoses and deaths caused each year by the problematic use of drugs.

Friends of Recovery-New York represents the voice of individuals and families living in recovery from addiction, families who have lost a family member or people who have been otherwise impacted by addiction. The negative public perception and shame that surrounds addiction has prevented millions of individuals and family members from seeking help. FOR-NY is dedicated to breaking down the barriers created by negative public perception that result in discrimination and policies that block or interfere with accessing recovery support services: access to addiction treatment, healthcare; housing, education and employment.

FOR-NY also works to build an infrastructure around the state through local Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) that build supports for people living in recovery and others in need. Our network of RCOs are strongly in support of life saving, evidence based practices to support people seeking recovery.

To start, we want to commend Governor Andrew Cuomo, OASAS Commissioner Arlene González-Sánchez and the legislature for their collaboration in order to provide more support for recovery support services in New York State than ever before. OASAS is now funding:

- Friends of Recovery – New York a statewide organization to train and empower local recovery community organizations to end negative public perception of people in recovery or struggling with addiction and to build recovery capital around the State.
- Youth Voices Matter – New York creating a network of young people and allies to create Youth Recovery Capital in NYS
- \$200,000 per year to provide scholarships to those interested in becoming a Certified Recovery Peer Advocate
- Recovery Community and Outreach Centers- serving 21 counties
- 18 Youth Clubhouses throughout the state
- Peer Engagement Specialists serving 34 counties
- Family Support Navigators serving 35 counties
- Center of Treatment Innovations serving 34 counties and 8 tribal territories
- Addiction Resource Centers – 1 in each of the 10 regions of the state.
- Recovery Tax Credit Program: \$2,000 per employer
- NYS Ombuds Program helping New Yorkers get the treatment services they are entitled to

It is thanks to these resources that thousands of New Yorkers are being served by evidence-based programming every day and we are extremely grateful for these services and resources.

We know, however, that more resources and support is needed to combat addiction and support recovery.

In 2017 nationwide, 72,000 people (that we know of) died of an opioid overdose and 88,000 died from alcohol related deaths. New York has been significantly impacted. 3,638 New Yorkers died from drug overdose in 2016,

an increase of 31% from 2015 and 61% from 2014. We are still awaiting New York's overdose fatality numbers for 2017.

On October 22, 2019 at the New York State Recovery Conference, a room of 500 people peers in recovery, friends and family members of those in recovery, and allies to the recovery movement were assembled for the second day opening plenary session.

Those in the room were asked to participate in a "Text to Survey."

Within 15 minutes, 130 respondents had responded to the survey.

In response to the question, "What are the top two most important recovery related needs in your community?:"

- 34% of responses indicated a need for safe, affordable **HOUSING**;
- 18% of responses indicated a need for better, more accessible, more **personalized TREATMENT** options;
- 14% of responses indicated a need for more wrap around services or **RECOVERY ORIENTED SYSTEMS OF CARE (ROSC)** <sup>1</sup>for those leaving treatment, or those who never participated in treatment in the first place and are looking to maintain a healthy lifestyle in their communities;
- and 11% of respondents indicated a need for improved **TRANSPORTATION** options, particularly in rural communities.<sup>2</sup>

**Friends of Recovery – New York will be focusing on these four top issues raised by our community in our 2020 advocacy campaign.**

**In light of these issues we are in support of the following legislation currently in circulation:**

- (1) Housing:** We support the Sober Housing Taskforce Legislation [S.2681/A.929](#) This legislation would empower members of the recovery community to take part on a task force to come up with proper standards for recovery housing in NYS.
- (2) Treatment:** We are very pleased with OASAS' partnership with SHATTERPROOF to develop a system of rating and identifying treatment programs so that individuals and family members may decide which program is right for them. We are also urging Governor Cuomo to sign the following pieces of legislation:
  - [Enact S.5935/A. 7246A](#) to ban Medicaid from engaging in prior authorization of all FDA approved forms of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). Currently in New York State Medicaid (Fee for Service and Managed Care), only the preferred forms of Buprenorphine and Naltrexone are available without prior authorization. The ban on prior authorizations should be extended to all FDA approved forms in Medicaid to ensure individuals can access their life-saving treatment without unnecessary and burdensome delays.

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<sup>1</sup>,A ROSC is a coordinated network of community-based services and supports that is person-centered and builds on the strengths and resiliencies of individuals, families, and communities to achieve abstinence and improved health, wellness, and quality of life for those with or at risk of alcohol and drug problems.

<sup>2</sup> Less than 5% of responses (each) indicated a need for Harm Reduction; Public Awareness; Employment options; Mental Health services; Services for Families; Self Help options; Resources for young people; Insurance Barriers; Class issues; Services for pregnant women and people of color; Funding Shortages; and Prevention Services

- o **Enact S.4808/A.2904** to prohibit certain insurance policies from requiring prior authorization for certain medications used in the treatment of substance use disorders
- (3) **Recovery Oriented Systems of Care:** We will push in this year's budget cycle to increase sustainable funding to OASAS in order to support services. While we are very pleased with the new recovery initiatives previously noted, the funding from such services are federal dollars. OASAS, in fact saw a decrease in overall funding last year. This is unheard of in the midst of an addiction crisis in this state! OASAS funding should be increased by \$62 million just to cover Recovery services. Recovery Community services are evidence based and are proven to save money over time as an investment in the community.
- (4) **Transportation:** FOR-NY is looking to partner with allies in transportation and mental health services to add money to the budget in order to fund more access to transportation for those who need services, particularly in rural communities, as well as offering stipends to those who need access to public transportation in urban communities in order to access services.

Recovery is not just an individual or even a family issue or illness, it is a community issue. While recovery addresses many areas of concern as indicated in our survey, the top four issues that are most important to our community were identified as Housing; Treatment; Recovery Oriented Systems of Care and Transportation and these are the areas we will be focusing on this budget and legislative session.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and to the people you serve.



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**Mission and Vision**

**WHO?** “Friends of Recovery - NY is comprised of NYS residents who are in long-term recovery from addiction, their families, friends and allies. We represent all sectors of the community, all regions of the state, and the numerous and diverse paths to recovery. We actively organize and mobilize the recovery community so as to speak effectively with one voice.”

**WHAT?** “Our mission is to demonstrate the power and proof of recovery from addictions and its value to individuals, families and communities throughout NYS and the nation. We actively seek to advance public policies and practices that promote and support recovery.”

**WHY?** “We envision a world in which recovery from addiction is both a commonplace and a celebrated reality, a world in which the entire spectrum of effective prevention, treatment and recovery support services are available and accessible to all who might benefit from them.

**FOR-NY Believes:**

- Recovery is possible for everyone
- Everyone achieves recovery in his or her own way
- Adequate resources and support are necessary for sustained recovery
- Recovery is about reclaiming a meaningful life and role in society

**FOR-NY Stands For:**

- Addressing addiction as a public health issue
- Responding to illicit drug use as a health issue rather than a crime
- Eliminating barriers to getting help
- Developing non-punitive, non-judgmental recovery service models
- Creating a system that engages and supports people to reclaim a meaningful life
- Including recovering individuals and our families at all levels of budget and policy development in the system

