

Testimony on the FY2021-2022 Executive Budget
Mental Hygiene
Civil Service Employees Association Local 1000
February 5, 2021

The proposed budget makes massive cuts to the state's mental health care system that will leave significant areas of the state with limited or no access to various types of mental health treatment.

The Executive Budget proposes to close Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center and make other significant reductions in service, including the elimination of 200 State-operated inpatient treatment beds and an additional 100 State Operated Community Residences (SOCR) beds.

These proposals are a continuation of the State's years-long effort to decrease capacity and bring down State-operated mental health services, regardless of need. Since 2014, OMH has eliminated 30% of children's beds and 20% of adult inpatient beds across the entire system. Despite prior claims that the agency was already operating with as few beds as possible, the State continues to come back year after year with more proposed bed reductions.

OMH claims that vacant beds at Rockland Children's justify its closure, but a short look back in time proves this claim to be false. Over the past several years, the facility was operating at or near capacity. It wasn't until the pandemic hit that the numbers began to shrink. Like many services, such as preventative health care and cancer treatment, many New Yorkers decided to bypass needed care within the mental health system rather than risk contracting COVID-19. This is especially true for youths, who have suffered severe mental health issues due to the isolation and canceled events that they have had to deal with over the past year.

The decrease in admissions is true not just at Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center but at youth facilities throughout the system. In January 2020, youth facilities admitted 169 children for inpatient services, with several, including Rockland Children's, at or near 100% capacity. Not surprisingly, by April, when New York was in a lock down, the number of admissions decreased by one-third. While admissions have since increased, they are still far below where they were in January 2020. This appears to be attributable not to a lack of need for services but rather an effort by the state to limit the number of people living in congregate settings. However, basing a permanent closure and downsizing of mental health services on a temporary decline in admissions and utilization is shortsighted and wrong.

This closure would be an abandonment of care for youth in the Hudson Valley. For years, Rockland County provided its own psychiatric services to children. In 2010, the county closed its facility and transferred the responsibility of providing these services to OMH

with the understanding that inpatient children's beds would remain in Rockland County. The closure of Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center would now leave the lower Hudson Valley with no access to public inpatient youth services. If this facility is closed, there will be no State-operated psychiatric inpatient services for youth from the Bronx to Utica. This is unacceptable.

Just one year ago, the Commissioner testified that the agency couldn't afford to lose more capacity in the system. Yet, here we are once again. The OMH budget makes it clear that the state wants out of the business of providing mental health services. The budget proposes to privatize and outsource State services. Furthermore, since the budget includes no reinvestment in community services when a state bed is brought down, the budget outright eliminates services in some cases.

OMH claims that the beds they are eliminating are vacant. Even if this is true, to make this judgment based on occupancy rates during COVID is irresponsible and premature. In addition, OMH has provided no information about where the 100 SOCR beds will be brought down and the impact that would have on services.

CSEA has always been willing to work in partnership with the agency to address issues, but right now this relationship is a one-way street.

The legislature must look at the current process in place for reducing OMH services and demand transparent and honest information from OMH. Only with adequate information can informed decisions be made that impact the lives of children and adults in need, the workforce, and communities.

The State Senate and Assembly must seriously consider the impact that voting to approve these cuts will have on the availability of mental health care for every New Yorker. If enacted, these proposals will leave massive regions of our state with limited access to care and leave others on waiting lists for the few remaining beds. We should be making investments in our inpatient and outpatient programs to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to the care that they need.