



Child Mind Institute

Testimony submitted by The Child Mind Institute

Presented to the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Mental Hygiene

Regarding the SFY2024-2025 Executive Budget Proposal

February 13, 2024

Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, Senator Brouk, Assemblymember Gunther, and distinguished committee members, on behalf of the Child Mind Institute, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the SFY2024-25 Executive Budget.

At the Child Mind Institute, we are dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. As the nation's leading independent nonprofit in children's mental health, we provide gold-standard care, deliver educational resources to millions of families each year, train educators in high-need and underserved communities, and develop tomorrow's breakthrough treatments. Our school-based mental health prevention, intervention, and training programs across New York City have made significant strides in addressing the children's mental health crisis, reaching over 10,000 high-need students each year, prioritizing schools where at least 65% of students receive free or reduced-priced lunch. We also provide a library of free, evidence-based resources on the mental health issues and challenges their families face. Our researchers are uncovering the biological markers of mental health and learning disorders so we can change and improve the way we diagnose and treat them. We know that mental health disorders are real, common, and treatable and that all children deserve access to the mental health support they need to thrive. We are excited to partner with Governor Hochul and the legislature to achieve this vision in New York State.

Supporting School-Based Mental Health Initiatives

We commend the ambitious proposals included in the Executive Budget to bolster mental health services in schools. The initiative to support the establishment of school-based mental health clinics through start-up funding, improved reimbursement for services, and enforcement of laws that ensure payer compliance is a critical step forward in meeting children's mental health needs. This approach not only recognizes the importance of accessible mental health care but also helps reduce the burden on parents by providing children with the support they need within their educational environment.

- New York has an opportunity to address these critical issues to further expand access to mental health resources for students. Issues include workforce shortages, the absence of standardized prevention and mental health skill-building education programs, and limited funding to empower educators to support mental health more holistically in classrooms. The Child Mind Institute's School and Community Programs offer proven solutions- preventative mental health skill-building and direct clinical services for students, professional training for educators and school-based clinicians, and resources that support communities. Our programs meet youth where they spend most of their time – directly in schools – and provide evidence-based mental health services to school communities at no cost to families while building school capacity to deliver our proven services independently. Our Healthy Minds Thriving Kids project offers a transformative solution: equipping educators, caregivers, and students (pre-K through 12th grade) with the tools and resources to build foundational mental health skills and create a statewide culture of well-being. Our programs expand students' access to care and achieve statistically significant outcomes such as improvements in emotional resilience and coping skills. With our extensive experience in providing school-based prevention and intervention programs to over 100,000 students, educators, and caregivers in New York City Department of Education schools, we are well-positioned to collaborate with the State to further support student mental health.

Enhancing Literacy Through Evidence-Based Approaches

We applaud efforts included in the Executive Budget to improve reading proficiency by advocating for evidence-based reading approaches. The allocation of \$10 million to train 20,000 teachers in the science of reading is a commendable investment. However, with nearly 100,000 elementary school educators in the State, a broader plan is essential to ensure that every educator can receive adequate training and resources to adopt these evidence-based approaches.

- The Child Mind Institute is prepared to further this initiative and urges the legislature to consider the same. Our neuropsychologists and reading specialists are well-versed in the Science of Reading and have engaged in advocacy, professional training, implementation planning, and direct service delivery related to effective screenings and Tier 1 and 2 interventions. We would support convening a task force of experts in New York State who can partner with Chamber, NYSED, the legislature, and others to bring the Science of Reading-based curricula and reading instruction to districts across the State. We have connections with a network of literacy experts who are eager to contribute to the evolution of New York's literacy programming statewide and could also participate in such a task force. The task force can address issues such as:
 - Providing guidance and resources at the state level with respect to the selection of evidence-based curricula aligned with the Science of Reading.
 - Defining processes and procedures for screening students in K and 1st grade to identify at-risk readers and triage them toward appropriate Tier 2 intervention.
 - Outlining an implementation plan for the statewide rollout of Tier 1 and 2 interventions, including teacher training and implementation support that will promote effective and sustainable programming.
 - Providing guidance around teacher training and credentialing standards, ensuring that early elementary school teachers are required to take coursework grounded in the Science of Reading and structured literacy.

Addressing the Risks of Social Media Usage

This administration and legislative body have made a significant commitment to creating educational resources on important topics such as the potential risks of social media use, safeguarding personal information and privacy, and reporting instances of cyberbullying, online abuse, and exploitation. This is a crucial step towards addressing the digital challenges that our youth face today.

- The Child Mind Institute has long been at the forefront of this issue. From our extensive online resource center and clinician-led public and media outreach to our pioneering work in digital therapeutics and research on problematic internet use, we are uniquely positioned to support this initiative. Every month, we provide millions of parents with dependable resources through our more than 1,000 articles on children's mental health and learning disorders. Our 2019 Children's Mental Health Report focused on social media and problematic internet use — years before the 2021 declaration of a national crisis in children's mental health by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children's Hospital Association and the issuance of a federal public health advisory on the youth mental health crisis by U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy. Recently, our research team published a study titled "Parent-Perceived Benefits and Harms Associated with Internet Use by Adolescent

Offspring" in JAMA Network Open. The study explored parental concerns and perceptions about internet use and its impact on adolescent development, safety, well-being, and family connectedness. In March, we will launch the "Positive Parenting, Thriving Kids" video series, which provides empowering information and evidence-based strategies for handling some of the toughest challenges children and their caregivers face. We are excited to leverage our experience and resources to partner on this vital effort to safeguard children and ensure their well-being.

Engaging the Youth Voice in Mental Health Initiatives

Establishing youth mental health advisory boards is a visionary step by Governor Hochul, emphasizing the importance of incorporating youth perspectives in health programs and policy development.

- The Child Mind Institute engages a Youth Council comprised of 25 high school students from New York City who provide valuable feedback on the development of our therapeutic programs, curricula, and resources—to ensure we can effectively and appropriately address the mental health challenges facing children and teens today. Our Youth Council members play an active role in our work, including sharing their lived experiences and perspectives during high-profile conversations with public figures such as former Speaker Pelosi, Surgeon General Murthy, and Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff while also conducting interviews with celebrities who share their mental health struggles during our annual Mental Health Awareness Month campaigns. We welcome the opportunity to lend our expertise and engage our youth constituents in the State's efforts.

Thank You

The Child Mind Institute applauds many of the initiatives included in the SFY Executive Budget and stands ready to collaborate with members of the administration and legislature and offer our resources, expertise, and dedication to address the mental health needs of New York State's youth.

Sincerely,



Dave Anderson, PhD
Vice President, Public Engagement and Education
Senior Psychologist, ADHD and Behavior Disorders Center
David.anderson@childmind.org
646.625.4315