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Frank and Ruth E. Caruso Foundation

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Testimony for the 2024 NEW YORK STATE EXECUTIVE BUDGET for HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

I am writing to you as a former social worker and as the president of a private foundation and visual artist. My name is Lisa Turngren and I am president of the Frank and Ruth E Caruso Foundation that funds NYC non-profits who focus on mental health in underserved communities utilizing the creative art therapies.

I am concerned that the proposed Health and Mental Hygiene Bill Part Q does not include LCATs who are currently providing essential mental health care to many of our most vulnerable New Yorkers. There is a great need and it is our understanding that there are not enough providers working with Medicaid consumers. LCATs who are employed at the non-profit organizations we fund have experience with this population and can immediately help close the gap in care.

I implore the Governor and legislature to reconsider and amend the Health and Mental Hygiene Bill Part Q to include LCATs because I am well aware of how deeply the arts can play a role in improving positive mental health outcomes for any individual and, perhaps, even more so for those in underserved communities who access Medicaid. Mental health services remain a stigma in our country, state and city. Individuals and families who receive Medicaid bear this stigma to a higher degree among many other stressors. BIPOC, gender non-conforming and members of the LGBTQ community may have more difficulties in connecting with and trusting mental health professionals who utilize talk therapy that can seem more of a burden or sometimes mandated under Medicaid. LCATs approach therapy in a way that may feel less intrusive or stigmatizing and more open naturally through art making. Creative Arts Therapy's inclusive and non-threatening approach often times has the ability to engage clients immediately, maintain their consistency in treatment, and make therapy and its interventions more engaging throughout the creative process. The act of creating something has transformative properties on its own. When we combine creation with mental health training the possibilities become endless, so why exclude professionals with these unique qualities?

If an amendment were in place and other bills were more inclusive of creative arts therapists a gap could be filled. LCATs are vital to the mental health field whose interventions are not only an added dimension to traditional therapy or medical interventions but have the ability to stand alone as a form of therapy that's accessible and ingratiating to all – especially underserved communities.

The arts are the backbone of New York City and without them, I don't think we would be deemed one of the greatest cities in the world.

The creative arts therapies are an integral part of mental health services. To leave out LCATs in this bill (or any others) is an oversight and a disservice to residents who are all a part of the creative force that makes New York and New York City great.

Respectfully yours,

Lisa Turngren
President

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