



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Elijah Reichlin-Melnick

## Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick and Assemblymember Didi Barrett Push Constitutional Amendment to Create Parity Between Mental and Physical Health

ELIJAH REICHLIN-MELNICK April 21, 2021



### **Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick and Assemblymember Didi Barrett Push Constitutional Amendment to Create Parity Between Mental and Physical Health**

**ALBANY, NY** - Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick and Assemblymember Didi Barrett were joined by Senator John Mannion and mental health advocates from around New York State to announce introduction of a NYS Constitutional Amendment that would create parity between mental and physical health (S3995/A5238). The amendment would create a minor

change in language with a major impact for the mental health community, by creating parity between mental health and physical health in New York State's constitution. The language provides that both mental and physical health "will be matters of public concern, and provision therefore shall be made by the state and by such of its subdivisions". The New York State Constitution has not been updated in regards to mental health since the 1930's.

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**Senator Reichlin-Melnick** (D-Rockland/Westchester), said *“For far too long in the state of New York, there have been two different systems, two different schools of thought, a structure of “separate but equal” treatment that has created a stigma around mental health and has had very real impacts on the way that mental healthcare is administered in New York State. Our bill, S3995 / A5238, will ensure parity between mental and physical health in the New York State constitution, guaranteeing New Yorkers that mental healthcare is healthcare. I am proud to partner with Assemblywoman Didi Barrett to introduce this legislation, and I look forward to the day when we can all say that mental healthcare is healthcare, and know that the constitution of the state of New York backs us up.”*

**Assemblymember Didi Barrett** (D-Columbia/Dutchess), said “After the year we have just lived through, there probably isn’t a person in our state who doesn’t have a greater understanding of mental health now. I have been proud to sponsor this overdue amendment -- the current language in the Constitution dates back to 1938 -- to ensure parity between physical and mental health in our state. In doing this, we both recognize the importance of mental health as a matter of ‘public concern’ and signal our commitment to support families and individuals who need to access mental or behavioral health treatment.”

**Matthew Shapiro, Associate Director, Public Affairs, NAMI-NYS**, said “NAMI-NYS has long advocated having mental health viewed as a part of physical health, as one simply cannot have physical without mental health and vice-versa. It is now more important than ever for New York State to make this recognition as we as a state cannot begin to recover and move

forward from the events of the best year without addressing mental health and having parity to ensure that psychiatric issues are fully covered. We are extremely grateful to Senator Reichlin-Melnick and Senator Brouk for fighting for equality and parity and their devotion to helping all New Yorkers recover through their efforts to advance bill S.3995.”

The legislators were joined by the following Mental Health advocates:

Glenn Liebman, CEO of Mental Health Association in NYS

James McDonough, Executive Director of Headstrong

Matthew Shapiro, Associate Director of Public Affairs, NAMI-NYS

Joan Hunt, Executive Director of Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood

Maggie Trainor, Dir. of Residential Services at Mental Health Association of Rockland

Claire Parde, Executive Director of Healthcare Consortium

The Senate version of the bill is co-sponsored by Senator Samra Brouk (D-Rochester) and currently in the Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by Senator Brad Hoylman (D-Manhattan). The Assembly version of the bill is in the Assembly Mental Health Committee, chaired by Assemblymember Aileen Gunther (D-Forestburgh).

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**2021-S3955**

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- - In Committee Assembly
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- - Passed Assembly
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Sponsored by Timothy M. Kennedy

Do you support this bill?