



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Samra G. Brouk

## New Brouk Bill to Establish Annual COLAs for Mental Health Workforce

SAMRA G. BROUK December 15, 2022

| ISSUE: **MENTAL HEALTH, NEW YORK WORKFORCE, INFLATION, COST OF LIVING**

**ALBANY, NY** - Senator Samra Brouk (SD-55) introduced legislation today to establish annual cost of living adjustments (COLAs) for New York's mental health workforce. The bill, S9615, would require the state to issue pay increases on an annual basis, with the amount of the increases being tethered to the consumer price index, so that wages increase alongside inflation.

At a time when officials at every level of government are drawing attention to the importance of mental health, Senator Brouk knows that no meaningful change can exist until New York invests in its mental health workforce. New York must have systems in place for those who independently seek mental health care, and those systems are contingent on a successful workforce.

Senator Brouk has established a record as a champion for wage increases for New York's increasingly vital mental health workforce. In 2021, Senator Brouk secured a 1% COLA for state mental health workers, followed by a 5.4% COLA in 2022. Prior to Brouk's advocacy, employees of state-funded mental health agencies had not received a wage adjustment in twelve years.

Stagnant wages and the resulting turnover have resulted in significant challenges for New York's mental health workforce, with some programs in the state seeing vacancy rates as high as 40%. To that end, New York's human services workforce is 80% women, and roughly half are women of color, making pay equity in this sector a racial and gender justice issue as well.

There is a growing need for a quality mental health workforce, with both children and adults needing mental health supports more than ever before. The United State Surgeon General, as well as the American Academy of Pediatrics have issued warnings, as well as declared a national emergency regarding youth and adolescent mental health. Further, The National Safety Council, released a report finding that 50% of large employers have observed an increase in mental health or impairment-related absences and incidents among their staff, and anticipates long-term effects to employees' mental health following the pandemic.

**Senator Samra Brouk said,** "Workers in the mental health field perform incredibly challenging jobs on a daily basis, and are often struggling to get by due to stagnant wages, increased hours, and burnout. I'm proud to have introduced legislation that will take the guesswork out of determining cost of living adjustments each fiscal year, and will finally codify the wage increases that these essential workers are entitled to receive."

**Glenn Leibman, CEO of the Mental Health Health Association of New York State said,** "As the mental health crisis worsens, community agencies need to do everything we can to recruit and retain a quality workforce. We are already facing high turnover and vacancy rates that dramatically impact the ability to provide services and supports for people with behavioral health needs. Investing in an 8.5% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) based on the CPI will help provided that needed investment for the community. We thank Senator Brouk for her leadership and ongoing commitment to help support a COLA in this coming year's budget.

**Sebrina Barrett, Executive Director, Association for Community Living** said, “For years, mental health housing providers have come hat in hand, urging that the statutory COLA be funded only to be denied and watch inflation deplete dollars desperately needed to serve vulnerable New Yorkers. This bill would ensure that funding keeps pace with inflation, giving providers reassurance that they will be able to keep their doors open, and families the comfort of knowing their loved ones will remain secure, with a roof over their heads, and supported by the services they require for recovery.”

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### **2021-S9615**

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- Introduced
  
- - In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
  
- - On Floor Calendar Assembly
  - On Floor Calendar Senate
  
- - Passed Assembly
  - Passed Senate
  
- Delivered to Governor
  
- Signed By Governor

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March 24, 2023

Do you support this bill?