

My name is Nicole Porter Davis and I have been a Licensed Creative Arts Therapist for 12 years. I specialize in trauma recovery with children, specifically following mass trauma events like the Newtown school massacre, where I coordinated therapy efforts in the immediate aftermath.

Licensed under Article 163 of the State Education Law along with the Family Therapists and Mental Health Counselors in 2006, the field of Creative Arts Therapies has been providing essential individual, group, and family psychotherapy in a wide variety of inpatient & outpatient settings across New York State, including OMH operated PROS and CORE programs, Article 31 and 32 clinics, substance abuse treatment outpatient clinics, IOPs, professional corporations licensed by New York State to provide psychotherapy, CBOs, non-profits, medical hospitals, corrections facilities, psychiatric hospitals and Charter Schools.

I am here today because New York has a mental health access crisis and this State Budget can help fix that problem by adding language to improve access to psychotherapy for those most vulnerable New Yorkers who rely on Medicaid for healthcare. The Division of Budget has determined giving our more than 2000 LCATs the opportunity to apply to become Medicaid providers will cost \$2 million this year to ramp up the number of therapists who can immediately fill workplace vacancies and provide already existing psychotherapeutic services in the many facilities in which we provide care.

Recently, one of my colleagues received a call from a care coordinator at MVP Healthcare asking if she could provide Art Therapy for a 6 year old child client with Medicaid coverage, for which she is an in-network provider as an LCSW. While she had no availability, there were four therapists in her practice who did have openings, but they could not see this child in need because they have the LCAT license....and this MVP rep was specifically seeking Art Therapy services for a child in crisis.

In December of 2021, Governor Hochul signed into law Chapter 819 - that passed overwhelmingly in both the Senate and Assembly. It allowed all mental health practitioners licensed under Article 163 of the State Education Law to be eligible for coverage under the Medicaid program. February of 2022, the Governor signed a "chapter amendment," Chapter 97 to specifically exclude LCATs and LPs, allowing for only two of the four Masters level licenses to be included on the Medicaid Provider List and ignoring completely the mental healthcare access crisis.

Since these 2022 actions, the need for licensed mental health practitioners in our state to provide desperately needed psychotherapy has only grown - especially for children and

teens. That is why I am here today to request the 2025 State Budget add licensed creative arts therapists (LCAT) to the Medicaid Provider List.

If you are not aware, LCATs treat some of the hardest to reach patients – children, the elderly, the non-verbal, and those for whom English is a second language.

Last year, after being told this was not a budget issue and our issue should be addressed as a stand-alone bill, and thanks to the extraordinary efforts of Senator Samra Brouk and Assemblymember Harry Bronson, and the support of many of you, including Assemblymember JoAnne Simon, as well as our collaborators 1199, Northern Rivers, Health+Hospitals, colleges throughout the state, and many others, our bill to add LCATs to the Medicaid Provider List for psychotherapy passed the Senate and Assembly nearly unanimously. Then in December, the governor vetoed it saying she agrees with the need, but the issue is better addressed in the course of the budget!

The CPT (procedure) codes for the psychotherapy sessions provided by an LCAT are the same codes used when a psychotherapy session is provided by an LCSW, psychologist or any other licensed mental health practitioner. Commercial health insurance plans including Cigna, United Health Care and Healthfirst have covered LCATs as providers of psychotherapy since 2008.

LCATs are integrated into health systems and mental health care across New York State – serving children, teenagers, adults and elderly. Very importantly, it should be noted, Licensed Creative Arts Therapists are uniquely qualified to work with refugees, immigrants, and non-English speakers due to the breadth of non-verbal, inclusive and culturally appropriate arts-based interventions used.

Our state's 2000+ licensed creative arts therapists are a critical component of our mental health system. We need to allow our most underserved Medicaid population access to their psychotherapeutic care. This is not a new service, but rather the same psychotherapy provided by all licensed practitioners - simply delivered differently. Adding LCATs to the Medicaid Provider List would improve access to much-needed care during our state's mental health and substance use disorder crisis.

On behalf of the Licensed Creative Therapists Advocacy Coalition, I respectfully request language be added to the State Budget to include licensed creative arts therapists (LCAT) to the Medicaid Provider List.

Thank you.