



**New York Association of  
Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Providers, Inc.**

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**NEW YORK STATE SENATE FINANCE  
AND  
ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEES**

**MENTAL HYGIENE BUDGET HEARING**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2010**

**TESTIMONY BY:  
JOHN J. COPPOLA, MSW  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**Coalition Members** Addiction Treatment Centers of OASAS • Addiction Treatment Providers Association • Association of Addiction Recovery Care Homes • Association of New York City Addiction Programs • Central New York Alcohol & Drug Association • Coalition for Community Services • Coalition of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Programs of Northeastern New York • Committee of Methadone Program Administrators of New York State • Consortium of Alcohol & Substance Abuse Services • Council on Addictions of New York State • Hudson Valley-Catskill Coalition • Nassau Coalition of Chemical Dependency Providers • Mid-Hudson Addiction Recovery Centers, Inc. • Northern Tier Providers Coalition • Quality Consortium of Suffolk County • Recovery Net • Statewide Black & Puerto Rican/Latino Substance Abuse Task Force • Therapeutic Communities Association of New York • Westchester Putnam Coalition of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Programs • Western New York Chemical Dependency Consortium

Good Morning. My name is John Coppola. I am the Executive Director of the New York Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers, Inc. (ASAP). We are the statewide association that represents the interests of chemical dependence and problem gambling treatment, prevention, and recovery programs from throughout New York State. Included in our membership are more than 200 agencies that provide a comprehensive continuum of services, nineteen statewide and regional coalitions of programs, and a number of affiliate and individual members.

Our membership is committed to working with the Governor, the Senate, and the Assembly to ensure the responsible stewardship of valuable resources and the provision of excellent quality services that improve the health and quality of life for individuals, families, and communities throughout New York State. Chemical dependence and problem gambling treatment, prevention, and recovery support programs are an invaluable resource to state and local governments looking to address the needs of their communities in a budget environment that requires provision of cost-effective services that produce the desired results.

ASAP understands that these are very difficult economic times and that New York State has a significant deficit that must be remedied with a combination of reduced expenditures and increased revenue. As we have testified in previous years, the deficit can also be reduced by spending more on programs that create savings when they achieve desired results. Investing in treatment, prevention, and recovery creates savings for NYS. Successful chemical dependence and problem gambling outcomes mean less spending for healthcare, criminal justice, public assistance, child welfare, domestic violence services, and many other needs that occur when addiction goes untreated,

Unfortunately, chemical dependence and problem gambling programs have seen their program's financial bases erode because, looking back for more than a decade of NYS fiscal years, state funding has not even kept pace with inflation, healthcare benefits and other expenses have sky-rocketed, and unfunded mandates have been unabated. Chemical dependence and problem gambling programs have frequently been asked to do more with less to the point that programs are now being forced to merge or close under the weight of increased demand and ever shrinking resources. The hens have come home to roost.

Governor Paterson has proposed a budget for the NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) that helps NYS realize a reduction in its deficit while supporting a significant expansion of treatment to address the need created by Governor Paterson's drug law reform. There is no way that drug law reforms could be implemented without additional resources for chemical dependence services, the cornerstone for the successful implementation of the reforms. We applaud the Governor for making drug law reform a reality and then following up to ensure that we are able to implement those reforms.

Governor Paterson eliminated the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for chemical dependence and problem gambling and other human services workers in his budget proposal. With a workforce crisis impacting chemical dependence and problem gambling treatment, prevention, and recovery programs, elimination of the COLA will make it even harder for programs to attract and retain Community-based organizations are concerned about losing staff to state agencies and unionized programs that will be receiving salary increases. We are also concerned about crippling increases in health benefit costs and the continued pass through to us of the cost for the tax that was levied on health insurance companies last year. Our employees are paying for and more out of their own pockets for a shrinking menu of healthcare benefits as rates go through the roof. Our dedicated workers seem to be the last consideration. They pay the price for our economic crisis and get double billed when they pay the price for our recovery as well.

***We urge the Senate and Assembly to include additional funding for salaries and health benefit increases when you reach agreement on a 2010-2011 NYS budget.***

Governor Paterson's budget included a four year extension of the exemptions enumerated in NYS's social work licensure statute. This statute has a significant number of unintended consequences that threaten the very existence of chemical dependence treatment and early intervention services. Scope of practice language, if implemented, would result in thousands of layoffs of treatment staff who are currently providing intake and screening services, developing treatment plans, and providing an array of treatment counseling services. These lay-offs would result in significant service reductions and program closures all across the state. The extension proposed by Governor Paterson is needed to fix this and other significant and very complex flaws to this licensing statute. Four years is the minimum time frame needed to appropriately analyze issues related to the licensing bill and to formulate solutions that will work for all concerned parties. Governor Paterson included this four year extension after consultation with OASAS, OMH, OMRDD, OCFS, DOH, SED, and other state agencies. ***We urge the Senate and Assembly to support the Governor's proposal for a four year extension of the exemptions enumerated in the social work licensing statute.***

Prevention services in communities throughout NYS are at serious risk. President Obama and Congress eliminated the Safe and Drug Free Schools program when they passed the federal budget for 2010-2011. This means that NYS will lose \$23 million that we have used to provide primary prevention and early intervention services in our schools. This, coupled with diminishing state support, has created an unprecedented crisis for prevention service providers. ***ASAP urges the Senate and Assembly to pass a resolution asking President Obama and Congress to renew the Federal commitment to prevention by restoring funding to a new prevention initiative that will support NYS's school and community-based prevention services.***

A serious threat to treatment programs has resulted from recent actions taken by the Office of the Medicaid Inspector General (OMIG). During audits in OASAS community-based treatment programs, disallowances have been made for reimbursement where there have been simple clerical or administrative errors having nothing to do with fraud, waste, or abuse. "Take backs" resulting from disallowances not related to fraud have totaled in the tens of millions, threatening the fiscal viability of affected programs. ***We urge the Senate and Assembly to pass legislation that limits OMIG's ability to penalize programs for simple human error not even remotely related to fraud, waste, or abuse.***

Chemical dependence and problem gambling programs cannot sustain additional cuts without significant lay-offs and service reductions, at a time when NYS needs to retain jobs and enhance services. We also cannot take on any more unfunded mandates. As OASAS and DOH continue to move toward implementation of the new Ambulatory Patient Group billing system, for instance, it is imperative that resources are made available for the billing software changes and additional billing personnel and training costs that will be incurred. We need the support of the Senate and Assembly throughout your budget discussions to ensure that we do not lose ground, are able to protect the resources we have, and can strengthen our workforce and services with the help of additional resources.

Aware that these are difficult fiscal times, ASAP has two recommendations that involve revenue generation that we would like you to consider:

1. According to Join Together's *Blueprint for the States*, "if additional funds are needed, states should consider raising alcohol taxes." We were pleased that the 2009-2010 budget included a modest alcohol beverage tax increase. The NYS

Department of Health has shown that taxes (cigarette tax for example) can be used as an effective public health tool. Increasing the tax on alcohol would help reduce underage drinking and provide much needed resources that could be used to support our request for workforce and health benefit coverage.

2. Increasing the availability of gambling options in New York has created more risk for problem gambling, increased the need for problem gambling prevention, and increased the need for treatment services for individuals with gambling addictions. To address this increasing need, ASAP recommends that 1% of all revenues from new gambling initiatives be set aside for problem gambling prevention and treatment services throughout the state. We also suggest that these funds be used to help study the impact of problem gambling and assess the need for problem gambling prevention and treatment services.

ASAP opposes Governor Paterson's proposal to sell wine in grocery stores. It will lead to increased underage drinking and a consequent increase in teen deaths from accidents and alcohol poisoning. We are also concerned that the Governor's proposal does not include increased funding for OASAS to provide the training of grocery store personnel, support community education and prevention, and resources for OASAS to monitor compliance with responsible grocery store policies.

ASAP is further concerned that the Governor has proposed expansion of gambling in NYS with no concurrent investment of resources for the treatment and prevention of problem gambling.

Additionally, as NYS continues to implement drug law reforms and as it begins to implement juvenile justice reform, ASAP strongly encourages Governor Paterson and the legislature to use some of the savings from prison and youth facility closures to support chemical dependence treatment, prevention and recovery services .

ASAP is committed to being a resource for the Senate and Assembly and a partner in your work to improve the quality of life in communities throughout NYS. On behalf of ASAP's membership, I thank you for your service to the public and assure you of our readiness to assist you. With gratitude, ASAP would also like to recognize the dedication and hard work done by Senate Finance, Assembly Ways and Means, Program and Counsel staff, and the DOB team.

Thank you.