

## **Legislators' Budget Bills Closely Resemble Governor's Proposal, Includes COLA**

The full Senate and Assembly passed identical FY 2014 budget bills (S-3000 and A-4200), which were also recently approved by the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee and the Assembly Budget Committee. Both bills propose a \$32.9 billion spending plan that closely resembles Governor Christie's proposed budget, which includes preserved funding for children's and adults' behavioral healthcare services. In addition, the legislative bill includes a provision for a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA).

"We are pleased that the State Senate and Assembly heard our call for a COLA for community provider agencies. While we know funding for a full 5 percent is not possible, we applaud the commitment of 1 percent for FY 2014, which will be a good start toward enabling community providers to better meet the unprecedented need for behavioral health services throughout New Jersey," said Debra L. Wentz, Ph.D., CEO of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies (NJAMHAA). However, the COLA will not go into effect until January 1, 2014; therefore, it equates to one-half of a percent for the fiscal year.

"The tremendous need for behavioral healthcare services, which continues to increase, relates to many situations: the emotional devastation wrought by Hurricane Sandy; the trauma veterans experienced during active duty, especially for those who endured multiple deployments; the impact of parents' military service on their spouses and children; and other natural disasters and manmade tragedies," Dr. Wentz stated.

"We also thank our State Legislators for supporting the preservation of behavioral healthcare funding for children and adults and increases in some areas that were included in Governor Christie's proposed budget," Dr. Wentz added. Additional funding will be allocated for Drug Court, which will ensure that nonviolent drug offenders receive treatment, rather than becoming incarcerated. In addition, \$4.4 million from the closure of Hagedorn Psychiatric Hospital will be reinvested into services provided through the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, including 130 supportive housing units; and \$8.4 million for the Olmstead settlement will fund 344 new community placements for individuals being discharged from state psychiatric hospitals.