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New Jerseyans Cannot Wait Any Longer for Life Saving Care

Advocates to Host a Virtual Press Conference April 18, 2024 from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

NEW JERSEY: For many years before COVID, New Jersey's public system for behavioral health care and services for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) has contended with insufficient funding while costs and demand for services have escalated and the workforce has dwindled. The pandemic has exacerbated all of these challenges, making it increasingly difficult for the dedicated providers to serve children, youth and adults in need. To raise awareness of the tremendous impact of these services and secure the State Legislature's support as members deliberate on the FY2025 State Budget, advocates will hold a virtual press conference, *New Jerseyans Cannot Wait Any Longer for Life Saving Care*, on Thursday, April 18, 2024 from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Behavioral healthcare services include mental health care, substance use treatment, support for managing the impact of I/DD and services to address social determinants of health (housing, food, transportation, education, employment and access to physical and behavioral health care). All of these services are essential and have been proven to save lives and greatly enhance quality of life.

"The Arc of NJ is grateful to the Governor and the Legislature for the consistent increases to Direct Support Professional wages as the state's minimum wage rose during these past several years. It is imperative that we keep this forward momentum going by again including \$42 million in the FY2025 Budget to increase wages by \$1.25 an hour. We can't afford to lose footing as this critical workforce is the true backbone of our system," said Thomas Baffuto, Executive Director, The Arc of New Jersey. "We are committed to being at the forefront of family issues and there is no greater issue for families than moving their adult child off the Waiting List and securing a placement on the Community Care Program (CCP). With an average wait of seven to ten years, the State must do more to reduce the Waiting List and provide peace of mind to aging caregivers who want to know their son or daughter is securely on the CCP, the gateway to residential services. We thank the Governor for including funding in his proposed budget to move 400 people off the Waiting List in FY2025. We urge the Legislature to increase the Waiting List appropriation by \$13 million to move an additional 200 people off the List, bringing the total to 600 people. This is part of The Arc of NJ's three-year campaign to move 1,800 people off the Priority Waiting List over the next three years."

"Due to the Administration and Legislature, for the first time in over a decade and a half, Early Intervention (EI) services began receiving more resources, which led to serving 17,000 infants and toddlers last year (thousands more than in years past). Nevertheless, inequities in access to EI services are pervasive," said - Catherine Gabriele Chin, Executive Director, Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities.

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“In New Jersey, Black and Asian children are less likely to receive EI while Hispanic children saw the largest decrease in EI due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, in Fall 2020, New Jersey served 4 percent of children under 3 in EI compared to 10 percent in Massachusetts. To continue New Jersey’s trend of expanding access and minimizing and preventing permanent disability in our children, a minimum 3 percent inflationary increase for EI providers in the Department of Health is requested,” Chin added.

“The New Jersey Alliance for Children, Youth and Families is grateful to the Legislature and Governor Murphy for their support for children, youth and families in New Jersey; however, we are extremely concerned that the current mental health system in New Jersey is failing our children,” said Megann Anderson Fischer, Executive Director, New Jersey Alliance for Children, Youth and Families (NJACYF). “Despite an unprecedented demand for youth mental health assistance and a record number of children waiting for care, the proposed budget does not include any additional funding for youth mental health services. New Jersey’s system is under resourced as more youth are being served by Care Management and Family Service Organizations than ever before, authorizations for intensive in-home treatment have increased 43 percent since 2019, and more calls were made for assistance through the Contracted Systems Administrator last year than in any year prior. In addition, 56 percent of New Jersey families of children with behavioral health needs reported difficulty accessing treatment. Without further investments, the children’s mental health system will continue to leave New Jersey’s children and youth without the mental health and the I/DD treatment they need, at the time it is needed. We are imploring the Legislature to allocate \$65 million to the New Jersey Department of Children and Families to combat the youth mental health crisis in New Jersey. The youth of our state and their families truly cannot wait any longer for life saving care.”

“The work of New Jersey’s Care Management Organizations, or CMOs, is very much in line with the Mental Health Playbook that Governor Murphy unveiled at the National Governor’s Association last July. The CMOs agree with the governor’s statement that ‘Our kids deserve better, and we can do better.’ Let’s give our kids what they deserve by fully investing in the nationally recognized youth mental health model we have in New Jersey. We are requesting \$32 million (\$16 million state/\$16million federal) to support an increase to the Medicaid reimbursement rate,” said James Parauda, LSW, Chief Executive Officer, Tri County CMO. “In addition to accessing federally matched funds, investing in the CMOs saves the state money by keeping youth in their homes and out of institutional care. Ninety-four percent of youth served by the CMO’s remain at home, in school and in their community.”

“Along with the pandemic and decades of a workforce crisis, rising inflation – over 28 percent since the industry’s transition to fee for service in 2014, and most of that in the last four years – dwarfs agencies’ reimbursement rate increases and continues to devastate agencies’ ability to provide services to people,” stated Valerie Sellers, CEO of the New Jersey Association of Community Providers. “Not only are business expenses such as costs for health insurance and overtime rising, but agencies are experiencing significant increases in food, utilities, gas, housing and vehicles – all the increases a homeowner is also feeling – demonstrating the need for an \$84 million across-the-board rate increase. While we thank the Governor and Legislature for their commitment to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the State needs to do better for the more than 5,000 people waiting at home and in institutions, including 2,400 people in nursing homes who could be living in the community. The consequences of doing nothing are dire for people with disabilities.”

“Due to the unprecedented levels of mental health and substance use crises, along with the suicides and overdoses, increased funds to treat children, youth and adults facing these illnesses must be among the state’s highest priorities for New Jersey’s Fiscal Year 2025 Budget. Despite more limited state revenues and resources, the alarming statistics reveal that the emotional wellbeing and very lives of individuals who are our family members, friends, neighbors and colleagues are being impacted every day,” stressed Debra L. Wentz, PhD, President and CEO, New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies. “Consider that in 2021, 48,183 deaths were attributed to suicide — one every 11 minutes; alcohol-related deaths increased nearly 30 percent between 2017 and 2021; and in a December 2022 survey, 58 percent of young adults

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reported no purpose or meaning in their lives in the previous month. Investing in prevention, treatment, supports and other behavioral health services prevents higher numbers of children, youth and adults landing in the emergency room, being hospitalized, getting involved with the criminal justice system or ending up homeless.

“New Jersey must invest an additional \$43 million in the State Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services for behavioral health fee-for-service and contracts; increase Department of Children and Families Services behavioral health funds by 7 percent; and add \$16 million in state funds to Care Management Organizations to assist all New Jerseyans on their path to recovery — to jobs, to better health, to being productive community members and reinforcing the state’s bottom line. Saving lives must be the state’s priority as all of New Jersey’s diverse residents are worthy of full investment in behavioral health care,” Dr. Wentz added.

To participate in this press conference, please click [here](#). (Meeting ID: 864 0593 2071; Passcode: 255295)

The Alliance for the Betterment of Citizens with Disabilities’ mission is to influence the development and implementation of public policy and to support our members in improving the lives of people with complex physical and neurological developmental disabilities so they can achieve their highest level of purpose and dignity.

The Arc of New Jersey promotes and protects the human rights of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes; and is committed to enhancing the quality of life of those individuals and their families through advocacy, empowerment, education and prevention.

The New Jersey Alliance for Children, Youth and Families (NJACYF) is an advocacy organization representing child, youth and family serving organizations in every county in New Jersey. NJACYF is the voice of children, youth and families advancing holistic health and well-being. Its vision is for all children, youth, and families in New Jersey to have access to what they need to be healthy and thrive and its mission is to collaborate to shape practices and policies that drive excellence in care for children, youth, and families.

The New Jersey Association of Community Providers represents providers dedicated to advancing sustainable community-based services and supports that enrich lives and build futures for people with intellectual, developmental and other disabilities. Its mission is to assist member agencies as they provide quality supports and services for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.

The New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA) represents 164 organizations that annually serve more than 500,000 individuals in all of New Jersey’s diverse populations who have mental illness and/or substance use disorders, and their families. NJAMHAA members may be found in every county and every community statewide.