

Behavioral Health Advocates Push for More Funding

By Josefa Velasquez Politico March 23, 2017

ALBANY — While direct care workers have garnered most of the spotlight in the Capitol this legislative session, behavioral health advocates are telling lawmakers that their industry also needs a boost in funding.

"We're looking for equity with the developmentally disabled providers and are in discussion with the state as to what that means when applied to behavioral health providers," said Harvey Rosenthal, the executive director of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

Direct care employers, those whose employees work with the elderly and disabled, have been complaining that the increase in the minimum wage makes it harder to recruit and retain workers if they can earn just as much in the fast food industry or in a less labor-intensive job.

The Senate and Assembly included \$45 million in funding in their one-house budgets for direct care employees.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie last week said that the Legislature and Gov. Andrew Cuomo's office were in [agreement that there should be more funding](#) for direct care workers.

Given that the work force for behavioral health is smaller, discussions with the state over how much funding they'd like to see in the budget are still ongoing, Rosenthal said.

"There's a lot of anger and discouragement in [the] mental health provider world because they feel like they work just as hard with the same kinds of challenges," he said. "We have a 35-percent vacancy rate because we can't afford to keep them," he added.

At a meeting on mental hygiene in the budget earlier this week, Sen. Fred Akshar suggested cutting down some of the projects proposed by the governor.

"What I would suggest, if we're looking for money, before we decide to build a gondola in Syracuse or a bike trail from Canada to New York City or put

synchronized colored lights on all the bridges in New York City, I would respectfully offer ... that we take a hard look at that and remember what our moral obligation is to the people in this great state," the Binghamton-area Republican said.