

Behavioral health groups meet with AG's office about opioid settlement funds

Behavioral health groups on Monday met with staff from the Office of Attorney General Letitia James regarding the importance of opioid settlement funds.

The groups called for language in the settlement to require the full balance of funds to be spent on prevention, treatment, recovery and harm reduction, the Coalition for Behavioral Health said. Nationwide, the amount could be as much as \$80 billion, although it's not clear yet how much New York may receive.

The group also included Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers, the Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, the Coalition of Medication-Assisted Treatment Providers and Advocates, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health, the Mental Health Association, and the Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services.

They also suggested that, if the money enters state coffers, the majority of the funds go to the Office of Addiction Services and Supports and a portion go to the Office of Mental Health to serve individuals with co-occurring disorders. As an alternative, they recommended including language in the settlement that creates an independent nonprofit—separate from state revenue or budget shortfalls— to oversee the funds.

In addition, the groups said funds should be readily available for community-based nonprofits, particularly in communities hardest hit by the opioid crisis.

They further called on the Legislature and Gov. Andrew Cuomo to include language in the budget that opioid settlement funds be set aside for such purposes.

"We want to make sure that the funds from the settlement are infused back into the system for substance-use prevention, harm reduction, treatment, recovery and co-occurring disorders," said Amy Dorin, president and CEO of the Coalition for Behavioral Health.

With the budget as tight as it is, she said, "this money could really be a boon."