



For Immediate Release

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PRESS RELEASE

Mental Health Advocates Announce Support for 9-8-8 Legislation

*Advocates Mark Mental Health Month while Demonstrating Need for
Increased Workforce*

(Albany, N.Y.) – Today, mental health advocacy groups, [Association for Community Living](#) (ACL), [New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services](#) (NYAPRS), [National Alliance on Mental Illness–New York State](#) (NAMI-NYS), [Mental Health Association in New York State](#) (MHANYS), and [Search for Change, Inc.](#), as they voiced their support for the 9-8-8 legislation currently in committee in both the [Senate](#) and [Assembly](#). The groups also used the occasion to mark Mental Health Month, and demonstrate the importance of awareness of mental health advocacy programs. Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, and a representative from Senator Samra Brouk’s office were also present.

“As Chair of the Senate Mental Health Committee, I am proud to sponsor Senate Bill S6194,” said Senator Samra Brouk, (D, WF – 55th District). “Our current systems do not work for New Yorkers in need, and this bill will transform the way our state responds to mental health emergencies. New Yorkers across the state experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis need an easy-to-remember number to dial, where they will get compassionate and professional support. With this bill, individuals or their loved ones in need of support can call or text 9-8-8 to be connected with trained mental health counselors. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Legislature to pass S6194 and usher in a much-needed transformation of mental health services in our state.”

“This 9-8-8 bill will make such a tremendous difference in the lives of New Yorkers,” said Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther, (D, I, WF – 100th District), Chair of the Assembly Committee on Mental Health. “Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people between the ages of 10 and 34 years old. It’s the fourth leading cause of death for individuals between the ages of 35 and 54. We are proposing to build on the federal

9-8-8 law, establishing a permanent funding mechanism. Appropriate investment is vital for our existing mental health system to expand our existing mobile crisis teams.”

“The initiation of a statewide suicide and mental health crisis hotline system will save countless lives on a daily basis, and I commend Senator Brouk and Assemblywoman Gunther for their steadfast efforts in this regard,” said Senator Peter Harckham, (D, WF – 40th District). “One recommendation we received during hearings before the Joint Senate Task Force on Opioids, Addiction & Overdose was that residents be able to access crisis intervention professionals ready to help at a moment’s notice. Certainly, we need to continue to look for new ways to safeguard residents, like making the 9-8-8 hotline a reality.”

“Both in New York and across the nation, we have seen far too often the tragic results that occur when those responding to a mental health crisis do not have the expertise to address mental health concerns,” said Sebrina Barrett, executive director, Association for Community Living. “The establishment of the 9-8-8 suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline is an important first step in ensuring that individuals facing a mental health crisis receive the help they need and begin the path to recovery. However, we must do more to ensure that there is an adequate mental health workforce to support the growing demand for care. These are rewarding but difficult jobs, and our workforce deserves to make a living wage. Despite the level of unemployment, few are applying for our jobs. As a result, our community-based mental health housing providers are facing a significant staff shortage, which has led to the temporary closure of some programs at a time when they are needed most.”

“Creating an innovative continuum of crisis services will provide long and critically needed additional mental health support to tens of thousands of additional New Yorkers,” said Harvey Rosenthal, CEO of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services. “At the same time, thousands of more New Yorkers will need follow up services—services that have been in their own state of crushing crises for many years, lacking sufficient program capacity and unable to attract and retain a talented workforce so programs may operate in a stable fashion.”

“Reforming the criminal justice-mental illness interface and ensuring that a mental health crisis is met with a mental health response is of the utmost importance to NAMI-NYS,” said Wendy Burch, Executive Director, NAMI-NYS. “Appropriately addressing a mental health crisis begins with having a mechanism to inform first responders that the incident they are responding to is not of a criminal nature. New York has an opportunity to introduce such a tool by implementing a 9-8-8 number to use for a mental health crisis. A 9-8-8 number will provide a gateway towards recovery and away from the criminal justice and corrections system which is disproportionately represented by people living with a mental illness. NAMI-NYS is tremendously grateful to our Mental Health Chairs Senator Samra Brouk and Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther for taking that first step to ensure that New Yorkers in a mental health crisis receive help and not punishment by introducing S.6194, which would implement a 9-8-8 crisis line in New York.”

“Crisis services in New York State are currently a ‘patchwork of services’,” said Glen Liebman, CEO, MHANYS. “The goal of implementation of 9-8-8, crisis stabilization centers, and mobile crisis teams is to create a ‘pathway to services’ for the countless New Yorkers in need of crisis care. We thank Senator Brouk and Assemblymember Gunther for their leadership in support of 9-8-8 legislation.”

“Rates of completed suicide have been increasing for many years, and stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the plight of individuals at risk of suicide and other adverse events,” said Ashley Brody, MPA, CPRP, Chief Executive Officer, Search for Change, Inc. “The establishment of a national (and easy-to-remember) suicide prevention and response hotline couldn’t come at a more important time. This hotline, coupled with an expansion of mobile crisis and other community-based services for individuals in crisis, is an essential component of our response to a worsening public health emergency.”

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About Association for Community Living. The Association for Community Living (ACL) is a statewide membership organization of not-for-profit agencies that provide housing and rehabilitation services to about 40,000 New Yorkers who have been diagnosed with serious and persistent mental illness. Many of the people served in these programs have co-occurring physical health problems and substance use disorders. The day-to-day rehabilitative and support activities performed in community residential and other housing settings are vital for people who face the daily challenges of living with a mental illness and want to live independent, productive and satisfying lives as members of the community.