



January 17, 2019

Dear NAMI-NYS Members and Mental Health Advocates,

Thank you for your willingness to enhance your advocacy skills and help NAMI-NYS strengthen our collective voice. As a grassroots movement, we are only strong and effective by having as many voices as possible come together to project our message on how to create a more mentally healthy New York State. As we commonly say at NAMI, “Hope starts with YOU.” Throughout the year, NAMI-NYS is going to focus on the importance of telling our stories, as our stories are our most powerful tool to bring about change. We need to use our stories and experiences to demonstrate why acting for mental health is so important.

This is a critical time for mental health advocacy in the Empire State. Changes in the New York State Legislature, specifically, the Senate changing hands, have presented us with an opportunity to make more positive change than we have in years. Reforms we have been advocating on behalf of our membership for several sessions (including making sure people get the appropriate medication, criminal justice issues and enacting Extreme Risk Protection Orders) which passed the Assembly, only to die in the Senate, now have a real chance of being enacted. While this is a time of great optimism, it is also a time of grave concern as the lack of funding for the mental health workforce and mental health housing programs has continued to fracture our mental health system, and too many New Yorkers are struggling to find the services needed to best advance their recovery. Our voice is needed more than ever. Included in the guide are two of our very own personal stories demonstrating the importance of community mental health support programs and the difficulties families are experiencing in accessing psychiatric services.

This advocacy guide is designed to ease anxieties people have about advocacy and help you both understand our 2019 Action Agenda and how to most effectively use your story to bring about positive change. Just quick notes about the Action Agenda: while we have provided you with all the details for each of our issues, do not feel as though you need to memorize all the facts and figures, as along with the in-depth information on the issues, we also have provided you with brief talking points. What’s most important is learning to tell your story to explain why these issues are important.

If you have any questions about our advocacy issues, please contact Matthew Shapiro at 518-462-2000 or [Matthew@NAMINYS.org](mailto:Matthew@NAMINYS.org). We look forward to seeing you at our [Legislative Advocacy Day](#) on February 12<sup>th</sup>.

In solidarity,

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Executive Director

Ariel Coffman, LMSW  
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