



New York State Campaign
For Mental Health Housing

For Immediate Release
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State Legislators Join Mental Health Advocates in Kicking Off Housing Campaign and Call for Passage of Bi-Partisan Mental Health Housing Waiting List Legislation

(April, 24th, Albany, NY) --An unprecedented, bi-partisan coalition of over 50 organizations representing mental health providers, consumers, family members, advocates, housing developers, social policy experts, legal rights organizations and concerned citizens came to the State Capitol today to announce the creation of a new statewide campaign to address the housing crisis for people with serious mental illnesses- ***The New York State Campaign for Mental Health Housing***. Campaign members were joined by Senator Thomas P. Morahan (R-New City) and Assemblyman Peter M. Rivera (D-Bronx), the chairpersons of the Senate and Assembly Standing Committees on Mental Health.

“The new campaign is dedicated to ensuring that people of all ages living with serious mental illnesses in New York State have access to safe, affordable housing and the opportunity for an active life in the community,” said Steve Coe, Executive Director of Community Access and Chairperson of the Campaign.

The current mental health housing system is in crisis with the demand for housing and supportive services greatly outpacing the needs of people with serious mental illnesses. Instead of investing in successful proven models for housing and services that improve people’s lives, the government spends millions of dollars each year on temporary shelters, hospitals, adult homes, jails and emergency interventions that do nothing to help people become independent and improve their quality of life.

The Campaign is launching a multi-year effort to educate the public and government policy makers about the need for New York State to undertake a comprehensive plan to provide appropriate housing to people with serious mental illnesses. The Campaign has three basic objectives:

- Preserve approximately 30,000 existing units of supportive and licensed housing;
- Reform existing models and programs to meet the complex needs of the clients being served; and
- Develop at least 35,000 new units of mental health housing statewide over the next ten years.

A smarter investment of State funds in mental health housing with support services such as counseling and job training will make it possible for people with serious mental illnesses to improve their quality of life at little or no cost to the public. Although the Campaign’s objectives would require an initial investment of \$100 million annually, a landmark study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania five years ago found that when homeless people with serious mental illnesses were placed in service-enriched housing programs, their use of expensive emergency services such as shelters, hospitals, and jails dropped by an average of \$16,282 per year. Comparing these costs to the expense of building and operating supportive housing, the researchers found that it **costs only \$995 more a year to house people than to leave them homeless.**

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In addition, the Campaign is throwing its support behind bi-partisan legislation (S.3653-A/A.2895-A), sponsored by Senator Morahan (R-New City) and Assemblyman Rivera (D-Bronx) to require the New York State Office of Mental Health to establish a waiting list for people with mental illnesses seeking community housing and support services. Matching an individual's needs with suitable housing and services in the most integrated setting is a key feature of the Campaign's reform agenda. This legislation is a powerful first step in identifying current and future needs for mental health housing in New York State. In addition, it will help to bring the state in line with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Supreme Court's decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*

"I am very pleased to be here to help launch the New York State Campaign for Mental Health Housing, as Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Mental Health. I believe the passage of the 'Waiting List Bill' is critical to assist in determining the unmet needs among people of all ages with serious mental illnesses in New York State," stated Senator Thomas Morahan.

"I applaud your efforts in bringing together all of the members of the mental health and housing communities in this broad-based campaign. Together our voices will help those who are discriminated against and forced to live in unsafe conditions on the street or inappropriately in institutions. The passage of the 'Waiting List Bill' is a crucial first step to address the State's serious mental health housing crisis," stated Assemblyman Peter Rivera.

The Waiting List Bill has passed out of the Mental Health Committee in both houses and is currently pending action on the Senate and Assembly floors.

"I'm here today to speak on behalf of all aging family members who are struggling to plan for future care of their children, most of whom need lifelong support," said Roy Neville of Schenectady, Member of the Board of Directors of NAMI New York State and father of two adult children who suffer with schizophrenia. *"Over the past several decades, family members have shouldered a tremendous share of the burden in caring for their loved ones with mental illnesses. We are prepared to do even more, and only ask for the government to participate with us as partners to plan for the needs of our family members. We are asking for a modest re-investment of state dollars for safe and suitable housing in the community with support services, in order to allow my two sons and all of our loved ones with mental illnesses to enjoy independent and productive lives."*

"A State investment in mental health housing is a cost effective, humane solution for the tens of thousands of people who are currently living in unsafe or unsuitable conditions on the street, in hospitals, adult homes, and other institutions," concluded Coe.

For more information on the Campaign go to www.campaign4housing.org.