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Mental health advocates rally for community-led response to mental health crises

For photos and b-roll of the event, click [here](#).

(New York, N.Y. December 20, 2022) — This morning, members of [Correct Crisis Intervention Today - NYC \(CCIT-NYC\)](#), family members, lawyers, community-based organizations, and other advocates rallied outside of Governor Hochul’s New York City office and urged her to invest in comprehensive voluntary community care services.

This rally comes just weeks after Mayor Adams announced a policy to involuntarily hospitalize individuals living with mental health concerns, which has been met with criticism from advocates, who are concerned with police-led response, hospital shortages, and support services post-hospitalization.

Sponsored by CCIT-NYC, Brooklyn Movement Center, Community Access, Crown Heights CARE Collective, DBGM Inc., 504 Democratic Club, Freedom Agenda, Housing Works, the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City, Inc. (NAMI-NYC), New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS), NYC Peer Justice Initiative, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI), Mental Health Empowerment Project, The Supportive Housing Network of New York, The Urban Justice Center–Mental Health Project, the rally featured speakers from a variety of organizations around New York City — all proponents of voluntary community-based care rather than police intervention. Advocates called on the governor to condemn the mayor’s legislative agenda, which would lessen standards for inpatient and outpatient commitment.

“Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. As any reputable mental health expert could tell you, policies of coercion and intimidation have no place in getting people the services they need. If we’re serious about helping New Yorkers, it starts with building trust and following best practices,” said **Assembly District 74 member Harvey Epstein**.

“Involuntary commitment is a profound deprivation of liberty. The administration should take great care with the constitutional standard,” said **Assembly District 52 Member Jo Anne Simon**. “The mayor’s approach instead over-relies on involuntary treatment based on the perceptions of law enforcement officers instead of trained mental health

experts. When we focus on individuals' needs for food, medical and therapeutic care, or supportive housing, public safety will follow.

“What our city needs most urgently is the expansion of voluntary community-based services, not more law enforcement involvement and coercion. The proposed implementation of increased involuntary transport and treatment is not the solution to the current crisis and will only cause further harm, said **Cal Hedigan, CEO of Community Access**. “I urge the governor to invest resources in our public mental health system and the people who work in it. Peer-driven, community based supports including safe havens, residential crisis support programs, drop in centers, support and connection centers, and accelerated development of supported housing are all part of the solution.”

“The Governor must reject policies that take us back to the past: more coercion, police action and focus on hospitalization. In her upcoming budget proposal, the Governor has an historic opportunity to make legacy making investments in significant, lasting solutions. More hospital beds and admissions will only create more failed discharge plans. In this regard, Governor Hochul should fund peer bridge transitional support, low barrier housing first and community based rehabilitation programs,” said **Harvey Rosenthal, CEO of the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services**.

“We urge Governor Hochul to issue a mental health plan that recognizes the state’s desperate need to provide voluntary, accessible mental health services to all who need them, and to refrain from the coercive efforts being promoted by Mayor Adams,” said **Ruth Lowenkron, Esq., Director of the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**. “Having a police officer transport an individual against their will to a psychiatric hospital, based on the officer’s belief that the individual is ‘unable to care for their basic human needs,’ is as inhumane as it is wrong-headed. Forced commitment is not treatment, and the individual in need will only be released from the hospital in short order, without even a plan for future care.”

“Supportive housing is a humane and effective solution to those who are experiencing homelessness and mental health concerns. Supportive housing is permanent and saves lives. Involuntary assessment by the police of those who do not pose a threat to themselves or others is most definitely not the solution – and can well have disastrous results. We hope the governor will join us in rejecting this ill-conceived and un-dignified approach to the City’s mounting homelessness crisis,” said **Pascale Leone, Executive Director, the Supportive Housing Network of New York**.

“The Housing Works community is strongly opposed to the Governor and Mayor’s dangerous forced hospitalization directive. Housing Works’ clients include a majority of people of color, including people experiencing homelessness, people with substance use disorder, and people living with mental illness. These populations are already critically underserved and at great risk of police violence. Frontline workers like Housing Works’ dozens of behavioral health clinicians know that our clients don’t benefit from forced hospitalization. They need housing, healthcare, and community care. I implore the Governor and Mayor to focus on creating more opportunities for evidence-based voluntary care, not to further traumatize vulnerable people,” said **Chief Psychiatric Officer of Housing Works Dr. Pierre Arty**.

“Applying a last resort measure, such as involuntary hospitalization, as a first response will never meaningfully address the mental health crisis in New York City. We urge Governor Hochul to reject the City’s recent policy directive and instead invest in evidence-based, comprehensive approaches that work, including more supportive housing and family support,” said **Matt Kudish, LMSW, MPA, CEO of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City (NAMI-NYC)**.

“The NYC Justice Peer Initiative stands firmly against any notion of involuntary confinement. As peers who have the dual-lived experiences of both Behavioral Health AND the Crimino-legal system - removing a person’s “voice” and “choice” does nothing but further traumatize, stigmatize and perpetuate harm,” said **Helen Skipper, Executive Director of the NYC Justice Peer Initiative**. “We invite the city to focus on trauma-informed responses and in particular to focus not on what a person has done but instead on how the city has failed them in not supplying appropriate resources, services and supportive mechanisms like peer support, adequate housing and care.”

"Governor Hochul's support for Mayor Adams' new forced treatment policy is dangerous at worst. At best it fails to address the root causes of homelessness and inadequate mental health care in New York City. Instead of relying on police officers, who are often unequipped to handle mental health crises, we should prioritize alternative approaches that involve trained mental health professionals and peer support. These approaches can be more compassionate and effective in providing the necessary long-term care and support to individuals experiencing mental health crises. We urge the governor to prioritize in this year’s state budget the development and expansion of community mental health resources, including peer support, counseling, therapy, and support groups, and to work with Black and other communities of color to ensure that individuals have access to the support they need to thrive," said **Anthonine Pierre, Executive Director of Brooklyn Movement Center**.

“Our community members need high-quality services, resources, and housing to support their recovery, not cops, coercion, and unnecessary hospitalization, which just keep people cycling through punitive systems. The Mayor’s directive will only lead to more criminalization and incarceration of people with mental health concerns, who already make up about half of the jail population. We call on the Governor to fund housing and support services so that people with mental health concerns can live with dignity in the community,” said **Minister Dr. Victoria A. Phillips - Dr. V of the Urban Justice Center–Mental Health Project.**

“The mayor's decision to forcibly remove people from public spaces and involuntarily detain them is not meant to help people, but to maintain profits for big business and real estate. What’s more, this policy comes alongside his ongoing cuts to social services across the city. In fact, it is the destruction of the social safety net that creates the conditions for violence in our communities and continued crises of mental and emotional health,” said **The Crown Heights CARE Collective.** “What New York needs is massive investment toward a society of care: accessible community clinics; non-police first responders trained in mental healthcare; safe consumption sites and support for drug users; and a housing first model. If the mayor really wanted to solve New Yorkers’ problems, he would redirect funds from the NYPD’s bloated \$11 billion budget into housing for all, healthcare for all, and other life-affirming institutions.”

"Given the pervasive and insidious racism in mental health care in NYC, the state and the country, where for decades Black and people of color were used for experiments, acknowledging that mental health care was never designed and intended for our communities, and the mistrust our communities have of both mental health and law enforcement, the Mayor's proposal is a variation on a theme, one used by his predecessors, Guiliani and Bloomberg, and further creates more stigma and discrimination,” said **Antoine B. Craigwell, President & CEO, DBGM.** “While a federal judge refused to issue an injunction to halt the implementation of these plans, we call on the Mayor to delay them for at least a year, to enable and develop a more robust and well funded mental health infrastructure, overhaul the mental health systems, revive the ThriveNYC program and Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), ensure more law enforcement are trained in MHFA and Crisis Intervention Training, and communities, including community based organizations with mental health programs, are equipped with culturally sensitive mental health professionals, who are better able to respond to the needs of those they’re serving, our Black and people of color community members. As an organization committed to increasing mental health awareness for Black gay men, and by extension, LGBTQ+ peoples of color, to prevent their suicide, we are concerned that this plan will further exacerbate the distrust our communities have for law

enforcement's heavy-handed approach, which for people already struggling with acceptance for who they are, is likely to destabilize them more."

"Coming from a low-income Latinx neighborhood in Queens created a lot of barriers to adequate treatment for my nephew. Due to those many years of no substantial help, his symptoms progressed and became severe which led to interactions with law enforcement and several psychiatric hospitalizations. I know what would have helped my nephew, and what makes our communities safe – its quality, accessible and voluntary CARE — not cops and not involuntary hospitalizations, which is what Mayor Adams has proposed. Instead, the city has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to keep him and others at Rikers when community-based care should have been the starting point for our communities. Governor Hochul we call on you to invest in voluntary community-based services NOT coercive mental health arrests," said **Ashley Conrad, Community Organizer at Freedom Agenda.**

"Treatment coerced is not treatment at all. Mental health treatment must never be used as a weapon, it dehumanizes the person, poses moral and ethical threats and is detrimental to our entire mental health system and more importantly our severely mentally ill and their families. Clinical social workers must be at the table before policy decisions involving the mental health care of individuals are made...our humanity depends on it," said **Shanequa Moore, Vice President of the National Association of Social Workers - NYC Chapter.**

"Valuing the dignity and worth of every individual as well as the right to self-determination, are central to the core values of the social work profession," said **Dr. Claire Green-Forde, LCSW, Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers- NYC Chapter.** "Social workers are among the largest providers of mental health providers in New York and in America. We practice at the intersection anti-oppression and anti-racist practice and It is imperative that the social work voice be included at all times, when making decisions regarding the behavioral health treatment of individuals."

"Rather than watch as the Mayor reboots 19th century Ugly Laws, Governor Hochul must tell the Mayor to work directly with impacted communities to develop realistic community-based solutions that meet people where they are and get them connected to the supports they need with the respect and dignity they deserve," said **Zach Garafalo, Director of Advocacy, Mental Health Empowerment Project.**

"Having just attended the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities' and other administration officials' attempt to further explain this initiative, I have come away from it

with more questions rather than less,” said **Michael Schweinsburg, President of the 504 Democratic Club**. “Although the initiative commenced weeks ago, everything in their presentation was forward-thinking as in 'will' ; talk of 'training'; etc. They speak of expanding B-HEARD at the same time that they're slashing its budget. Finally, who will be held accountable for the many foreseeable abuses - in real terms - not politically or by scapegoating.”

“The Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) recognizes that individuals with chronic mental health issues are people with disabilities. They are entitled to the protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. CIDNY acknowledges that good mental health is a right for all, and we stand in support for people with mental health disabilities,” said **Sharon McLennon-Wier, Ph.D., MEd., CRC, LMHC, Executive Director for CIDNY**.

About CCIT-NYC

[CCIT-NYC](#) is a coalition of [more than 80 mental health advocacy and other community organizations](#), consisting of hundreds of community stakeholders, working to transform how New York City responds to mental health crises. CCIT-NYC has proposed a mental health crisis response system that replaces police with teams of trained peer specialists and independent emergency medical technicians, based on input from two 100-plus-member community focus groups and a review of relevant research. For more information about CCIT-NYC and its proposal, visit <http://www.ccitnyc.org/who-we-are/our-proposal>.

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