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“If your child is not healthy, my child is not safe”

By Andrew Malekoff

Are we going to continue to catch the children that are falling through the cracks or are we going to abandon them?

There is a critical decision that has been made in Albany that will impact negatively on thousands of children and families across Nassau County and that will dramatically increase costs to taxpayers as increasing numbers children will be removed from their homes and institutionalized.

The New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) has implemented a plan that they call *Transforming New York’s Mental Health System* (the Plan). The Plan is a blueprint for the destruction of children’s community-based outpatient mental health services in Nassau County.

Here are the facts:

The Plan is dramatically skewed in favor of funding services for individuals with Medicaid-only insurance coverage. At North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center, for example, this represents only 7% of people that use mental health services.

The Plan discriminates against the middle and lower middle class and working poor families that are underinsured or uninsured and live in the suburbs of Nassau County. In fact, the Plan discriminates against all people that pay taxes and are entitled to basic mental health services. Although the Plan refers to something called an “uncompensated care” provision, it does not address the deficit generated when serving a preponderance of middle and lower middle class and working poor families.

Community mental health centers are the last bastion in addressing the needs of children and teens with serious emotional disturbances and their families. Private psychotherapists and counselors, with rare exception, cannot afford to offer the labor intensive work necessary to properly serve families that are struggling with serious emotional disturbance. If you know one that can, terrific! Competent private practitioners know when they can handle a situation on their own and when they need to refer to a community-based agency that specializes in children’s mental health; the very place that the New York State Office of Mental Health has kicked to the curb.

The consequence of the OMH Plan will be devastating to the children and families in Nassau County. It will lead to the loss of life, children being plucked from their homes and institutionalized, and families being splintered and destroyed.

I ask you to join me in calling on Nassau County and New York State to restore and enhance local assistance funding – a partnership between local and state government, the

local community and client-consumer. Local assistance funding will support community-based children's mental health centers that would otherwise disappear or be rendered ineffective as the result of the dramatic lack of government support to the suburbs that the Plan represents.

Call Tom Suozzi and your local County and State legislators and tell them:

- That the New York State Office of Mental Health's Plan discriminates against their constituents - the middle and lower middle class and working poor children and families that are uninsured and underinsured.
- The New York State Office of Mental Health is discriminating against children and youth with mental health disorders and their families.
- To restore local assistance funding in New York State or there will be no responsive, community-based children's mental health services in Nassau County.

I urge you to take just a few moments of your time to join the fight for children's mental health. Community mental health center's are there for you and your family in your time of need. Things may be going great in your family, but we know that even when they are, the unexpected enters and we all need a credible place to turn to.

And, if you are fortunate enough to never need such help, please bear in mind what a local mom once told me about her reason for supporting children's mental health, "If your child is not healthy, my child is not safe."