



**Reimagine Crisis**  
**New York Needs a Mental Health Response to a  
Mental Health Crisis**

December 22, 2021

The Honorable Kathleen C. Hochul, Governor  
The State of New York  
New York State Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

The undersigned organizations, representing a broad cross-section of mental health, substance use, suicide prevention, health, criminal legal and children's advocates, along with healthcare providers and faith leaders are writing you to congratulate and express our gratitude to you for advancing the requirements for the state to plan for and report on the steps that will be necessary for the establishment of an effective 9-8-8 call-system to replace 9-1-1 as the appropriate number to use for someone experiencing a mental health crisis.

While we celebrate that New York has advanced the 9-8-8 initiative, we want to implore you and legislative leaders as you continue to negotiate 9-8-8's implementation in the upcoming 2022 session that you include the following elements we agree to be necessary to 9-8-8's success in New York State.

To be successful and truly aid those it intends to help, then 9-8-8 must be appropriately funded (and sustained) in order to provide 24 hour statewide coverage, seven days a week with all the services offered in-state with the ability to provide local resources in a linguistically and culturally competent manner. There also must be funding to accommodate an appropriate workforce to create the necessary capacity to meet this need.

Additionally, funding must be available to educate the public on the difference between 9-8-8 and 9-1-1. Finally, we want to the New York State Office of Mental Health to oversee 9-8-8's operations.

Details of these recommendations can be found in NAMI-NYS's recent [report on the need for 988 and a Mental Healthcare Response](#) system. These measures are long overdue as the criminalization of mental illness is one of the leading social justice issues of our time. New York's jails and prisons are disproportionately populated by people with a mental illness who

deserve treatment and recovery, not punishment. It is estimated that more than 60% of New York's incarcerated population has either a diagnosable mental illness or substance use issue.

For far too many, entry into the criminal legal system began with them experiencing a mental health crisis and with a call to 9-1-1. As our system is currently configured, calls to 9-1-1 can be entry points down a road leading to punishment. This is especially true in communities of color, who are far less likely to have access to mental health care and far more likely to have a negative interaction with law enforcement. New York needs to create a divergent path that leads toward care and recovery; a fully-funded 9-8-8 is the gateway to this path to recovery.

As we continue to see surges in COVID-19, the need for mental health crisis services continues to grow. New York has an incredible opportunity to take a vital step in decriminalizing mental illness and establishing a mental healthcare response to a mental health crisis, but it is important to note that New York only has one opportunity to implement 9-8-8 and all the sweeping promises it holds, correctly. We urge you to make the most of this landmark opportunity and ensure that 9-8-8 is implemented correctly with sustainable funding.

New Yorkers deserve hope, healing and recovery, not punishment. New Yorkers deserve a fully-funded and properly funded 9-8-8 system.

We thank you for your attention to this issue and look forward to working with you and legislative leaders to create a mentally healthier and just New York State.

Sincerely,

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
(AFSP)

AFSP Greater Central NY

AFSP Hudson Valley

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
Capital Region

Association for Community Living New  
York State

Brooklyn Quakers

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany

Catskills Addiction Coalition

Center For Community Alternatives

Center for Community Alternatives

Center for Independence of the Disabled,  
NY

Child Care Council of Westchester

Chinese-American Family Alliance for  
Mental Health

Coalition of Medication Assisted Treatment  
Providers and Advocates (COMPA)

Community Access, Inc.

Crisis Text Line

Decarcerate Tompkins County

DePaul Housing

Early Care & Learning Council

EndQINY

Epilepsy Foundation North Eastern New  
York

Families Together in New York State

Friends of Recovery New York

Gateway Hudson Valley

Goodwill of the Finger Lakes

Harlem United

Hispanic Health Network

Latino Commission on AIDS

Legal Action Center

Living Hope for Mental Health  
Long Island AFSP  
Long Island Council of Churches  
Long Island Social Justice Action Network  
Mental Health America  
Mental Health America of New York State (MHANYS)  
MHA in Chautauqua County  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)  
National Alliance on Mental Illness-New York State (NAMI-NYS)  
NAMI Buffalo & Erie County  
NAMI Capital Region  
NAMI Cayuga County  
NAMI Champlain Valley  
NAMI Columbia County  
NAMI Delaware & Otsego Counties  
NAMI Finger Lakes  
NAMI Huntington  
NAMI Mid-Hudson  
NAMI Montgomery, Fulton & Hamilton Counties  
NAMI New York City Metro  
NAMI NYC Staten Island  
NAMI Orange County  
NAMI Putnam County  
NAMI Queens/Nassau  
NAMI Rochester  
NAMI Rockland  
NAMI Schenectady  
NAMI Sullivan County  
NAMI Syracuse  
NAMI Westchester County  
National Action Network NYC Chapter  
Second Chance Committee  
New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS)  
New York City AFSP  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

New York State Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare  
North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center  
Northern Rivers  
NYS Association of Counties  
NYS Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health  
NYS Conference of Local Mental Hygiene Directors  
NYS Network for Youth Success, Inc.  
Policy Research Associates, Inc.  
Prevent Child Abuse New York  
Public Interest Resource Center, Fordham Law School  
Race Talk Revolution, Inc.  
Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University  
Restoration Society Inc  
Restore Our Community Coalition  
River Towns Civil Rights Network  
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy  
St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction  
The Coalition for Behavioral Health  
The Jed Foundation  
The Kennedy Forum  
The STARR Coalition  
The Trevor Project  
Transform Stigma  
United Community Center of Westchester  
Uptown Progressive Action  
Urban Justice Center  
Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project  
Vibrant Emotional Health  
Vocational Instruction Project Community Services, Inc.  
Westchester AFSP  
Westchester Children's Association  
Westchester Women's Agenda

Western NY AFSP

Zappalarti Soceity for LGBTQI Mental  
Health

cc:

New York State Senator Samra Brouk, Chair, Mental Health Committee

New York State Assembly Member Aileen Gunther, Chair Mental Health Committee

New York State Senator Pete Harckham, Chair, Committee on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse

Jihoon Kim, Deputy Secretary for Human Services and Mental Hygiene

New York State Senator Liz Krueger, Chair, Finance Committee

Alison Mitchell, Counsel to the Governor

Robert Mujica, Director, Division of the Budget

Mark Noordsy, Deputy Commissioner and Counsel. Office of Mental Health

Peg O'Shea, Chief Budget Examiner, Division of the Budget

Ann Sullivan, MD, Commissioner, Office of Mental Health

New York State Assembly Member Helene Weinstein, Chair, Ways and Means Committee

Charlie Williams, Deputy Director, Division of the Budget

David Wollner, Legislative Coordinator, Office of Mental Health