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### **NY Phoenix House CEO Testifies at NYS Assembly Hearing on Integrative Services to Treat Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorder**

Ann Marie Foster, CEO and President of Phoenix House of New York and Long Island, testified at a New York State Assembly hearing today about the benefits of an integrated services model of treating patients, which allows providers to treat together a patient's co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.

Foster warned that the "stigma related to either mental health or substance use prevents people from seeking the treatment they desperately need," and described how integrative services result "in more complete care by addressing the whole patient, instead of individual diagnoses."

In her testimony, Foster called for the Assembly to pass the Integrative Services Act of 2021. After 2020's steep increase in the prevalence of both mental illness and substance use disorder, "If there was ever a time to increase access to effective treatment for substance use disorder and mental illness, it's now."

See attached and below for Foster's testimony.

#### **About Phoenix House:**

Since 1967, Phoenix House New York has helped thousands of people overcome substance and alcohol use in order to lead healthy, productive, and rewarding lives. Phoenix House New York offers short-term and long-term residential, intensive outpatient, and general outpatient treatment. Phoenix House also offers treatment for co-occurring mental health disorders, medical, psychiatric, and dental services, and impaired driver programs. These services are designed to meet the individual needs of adults at various stages of recovery, including military personnel, and veterans. In addition, Phoenix House provides educational and supportive services to family members, friends, significant others, and the community.

## **Testimony**

Hi, I am Ann Marie Foster, CEO and President of Phoenix House.

An integrated services program is extremely beneficial to at-risk and underserved populations. Integrated services allow us, as providers, to accept patients entering for either mental health OR substance use issues, and allow us to screen for and provide treatment or preventative services for those disorders that so frequently co-occur. This creates a No Wrong Door approach, so that people can enter and receive services in a way that is more patient-centered and responsive to their needs.

Many patients who come to us have never had a careful diagnostic evaluation, as substance use may predate mental illness and vice-versa. A residential program is the best shot most of our clients have to receive a careful stepwise diagnosis. Phoenix House can provide this much needed integrated and high-level model.

People diagnosed with Bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, generalized anxiety, and post traumatic stress disorder are at increased risk

for substance use disorder. But the 822 regulatory standards can prevent clients from accessing the full scope of treatment that they need. An integrated model addresses this problem by allowing providers to meet and treat a patient's presenting clinical needs, even if those needs aren't completely consistent with a patient's primary diagnosis.

Our patients are their own experts. They have the right to determine for themselves what kinds of services will benefit their overall wellness. This is another reason why integrative services are so beneficial: they allow our patients to decide how they enter and engage with services.

Stigma related to either mental health or substance use prevents people from seeking the treatment they desperately need. For some, they are comfortable saying they need help for a substance use issue but are not yet ready to share that they have a history of childhood trauma for which they have never sought treatment. When entering treatment in an integrated program, a comprehensive screening and evaluation will open the door to discussing other issues which may be the cause of or the result of a substance use disorder.

At Phoenix House, our licensed and credentialed staff have the training and experience to treat co-occurring substance use disorder and psychiatric illness. We don't just provide psychiatric care and medication management services, but also have medical staff to meet our patients' physical health needs. We are fully equipped and ready to meet the requirements of the integrated model of care proposed by the Comprehensive Services Act.

An integrated services model is what works best for patients. It results in more complete care by addressing the whole patient, instead of individual diagnoses. By bringing patients' broader health needs to the fore, integrative services address service gaps across the healthcare system.

And providing services in an integrated outpatient service is cost effective. People receiving services through multiple organizations for mental health, substance use and physical conditions usually undergo costly, repetitive evaluations, laboratory testing and receive overlapping individual and group treatment services.

If there was ever a time to increase access to effective treatment for substance use disorder and mental illness, it's now. Our community

experienced unprecedented challenges during the coronavirus pandemic. Phoenix House members have exhibited an increase in both the presentation and exhibition of substance use disorder and mental illness. Across the country, the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation rose in 2020. In the second quarter of 2020 compared to the second quarter of 2019, prevalence of symptoms of anxiety disorder were three times higher, prevalence of depressive disorder was approximately four times higher, and suicidal ideation was two times higher.

The use of evidence-based treatment to properly diagnose and treat mental health and co-morbid substance use disorder to meet the ever changing needs of our community are standard practice at Phoenix House. We are equipped to provide integrative services, and know that an integrative method is the best way to treat our patients. Please pass the Integrative Services Act. Thank you.