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Leadership Team
New York State Division of the Budget

Re: Testimony for Brooklyn Town Hall Meeting

Hello. My name is Dr. Christian Huygen. I am the executive director of Rainbow Heights Club, which is an agency located on Flatbush Avenue, between BAM and Junior's, that serves lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people living with serious mental illness. It's the only government funded agency of its kind in the country.

These are people who usually receive very poor treatment, if they receive treatment at all. As a result, they often go back to the hospital, over and over and over again. BUT, over 90% of the people who come to Rainbow Heights Club are able to stay out of the hospital every year, which saves New Yorkers millions of dollars annually.

This year, for the first time, New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene officially recognized the special mental health needs of LGBT New Yorkers. I quote from the 2008 Local Government Plan for Mental Health Services: "The size of the City's LGBT population may be nearly 345,000 people. LGBT individuals suffer from higher rates of depression and anxiety than do heterosexuals... Nearly 1 in 4 LGBT New Yorkers report having any kind of mental health disorder... People who are LGBT, particularly youth, are more likely to commit suicide. The critical issue for the LGBT population may not be access to services, but receipt of the appropriate services... Mental health service providers may need to assess their programs and treatment strategies to ensure that they are supportive of people who are LGBT, and responsive to their unique needs and experiences. The ability of community providers to serve this population is particularly critical because of the relative dearth of programs dedicated to serving the LGBT community."¹

This historic, first-time-ever recognition of my community's needs will have no meaning if it doesn't translate into the commitment of resources to ensure that all New Yorkers are able to get the mental health care they need, to stay out of the hospital, and even just to survive. Quality mental health services for LGBT people pay for themselves many times over by keeping people out of the hospital and in the community. I urge you to commit budget resources to meeting the needs of this population – or at the very least, I urge you not to diminish the level of support you currently provide.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,

Christian Huygen, Ph.D.
Executive Director

¹ The complete Local Government Plan for Mental Health Services is available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/mh/mh-localgovtplan-2008.pdf>.