

CAZENOVIA RECOVERY SYSTEMS. INC.

On-line Testimony

**Support
for**

Supportive Housing Network of New York

2008-2009 New York Budget Recommendations

November 28, 2007

As Executive Director of Cazenovia Recovery Systems, Inc., I wish to thank Mr. Paul Francis, Budget Director and members of his staff, for the opportunity to forward comments regarding the inclusion of much needed funding in the 2008-2009 New York Budget to support the expansion of supportive housing in conjunction with adequate supportive services for individuals with limited incomes and individuals with special needs. In particular, we wish to advocate for funding to support the development of affordable and safe supportive and permanent housing for adults with substance abuse and mental health disorders, many of whom are homeless due to their disability.

For more than 25 years, Cazenovia Recovery Systems, Inc. has provided residential treatment services to men and women residing in Western New York. Founded in 1982, the organization began as a small residential program located in South Buffalo. Today, the organization has grown in size from operating one 18-bed halfway house to maintaining a full continuum of residential services.

We have the capacity to serve 171 men and women with substance abuse disorders and/or co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders; and, our programs range from intensive residential care to community-based supportive housing. We serve a broad spectrum of individuals from all income brackets, including the impoverished, the well-to-do, the homeless, veterans and individuals with a history of incarceration. Many of our residents have lost everything, including their homes, their jobs and their families because of their substance use and/or abuse.

As a certified provider of chemical dependence residential treatment services by the New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services and as a certified provider of residential services for adults with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders by the New York State Office of Mental Health, we are well aware of the lack of and need for affordable and decent housing in Western New York for individuals in recovery. However, finding safe and affordable housing is extremely challenging.

Complicating the housing issue is finding employment that is compatible with the availability of public transportation. For example, in Erie County, many jobs that would be suitable for our residents are located in the suburbs where public transportation is limited or non-existent. Unfortunately, if the residents do not own a car or have access to one, they cannot consider applying for jobs in such organizations.

As a result of our experience providing these services and as witness to the multitude of needs, we are asking that the NYS Division of the Budget include the following items in its capital and operational budgets:

- ✓ Expansion of access to supportive housing, especially for adults with substance abuse disorders and co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders and the enhancement of funding to support the development of affordable and decent permanent housing for adults with substance abuse disorders and mental health disorders; and
- ✓ Development of creative funding mechanisms and partnerships that will improve access to public transportation and the enhancement of employment opportunities; thus, leading to the promotion of long-term residential stability for adults with disabilities.

Specifically we wish to propose the following:

- ❑ **Expand the provision of decent and affordable supportive housing options for adults with substance abuse and mental health disorders.**

This may be accomplished by enhancing financial support for development, construction of new housing and rehabilitation of existing property. Many of the Western New York neighborhoods could be re-built and revitalized by developing new and affordable housing for the community-at-large and individuals with special needs. Having access to loans and other funding opportunities will not only improve our landscape but will give hope to individuals who are in desperate need to live their lives freely and openly, without discrimination.

In particular we request that the New York State Budget include the following:

- ✓ An increase of \$50 million to the New York State Office of Mental Health to support capital development of community-based housing for adults with mental health disorders and co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders residing in Western New York.
- ✓ Allocate \$2 million to OASAS to develop a pilot program for housing-based services offered within a supportive housing environment. More than half of supportive housing residents have histories of substance abuse and co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders. But supportive housing providers have historically provided supports to people in recovery with no OASAS funding. In addition, many people leave in-patient rehabilitation each year to unsupported living situations; thus, sharply increasing relapse rates.

Such a program should include basic supportive services, case management, and most importantly, vocational training so that people in recovery can quickly reintegrate into the world of work. A pilot initiative in the 2008-2009 Executive Budget will ensure that OASAS' most challenging (and expensive) clients will for the first time gain access to housing developed by DHCR, HFA, and OTDA's HHAP.

- ✓ Increase of \$30 million (from \$30 million to \$60 million) to the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP) budget to increase the provision of capital funding to non-profit providers to build supportive housing, especially for homeless adults with substance abuse disorders and co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders.
- ✓ Increase the monies available for capital housing development programs by \$100 million. These funds would enhance Division of Housing and Community Renewals Housing Development's budget in order to increase the investment in capital construction, especially in Western New York. Such an investment would allow DHCR to expand the availability of supportive housing and integrated affordable housing in our communities.
- **Initiate creative funding mechanisms and interagency partnerships that will promote housing while expanding the availability of access to public transportation and employment opportunities for adults with limited incomes, especially those with special needs residing in Western New York.**

Individuals with special needs, especially those with substance abuse and mental health disorders are greatly inhibited by the lack of transportation and employment opportunities within the City of Buffalo.

Poverty is a great predictor. Being poor leads to limited choices of places to live and places to work. If you do not have transportation you may not always have access to work. And, if you do not have a job, you cannot be independent. Thus, the cycle of poverty continues to reverberate throughout our communities.

The limitations of the Western New York's public transportation system in making available transportation to and from the suburbs and rural communities, has been well documented in the Greater Buffalo Regional Transportation Council's (GBNRTC) report entitled "Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan for Erie and Niagara Counties (HSTP)" (2007). Because individuals with limited incomes and individuals with special needs are dependent upon the availability of accessible and affordable public transportation, their options for independence and self-sufficiency are severely compromised.

Our organization greatly appreciates having the opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of funding in the 2008-2009 New York Budget to support the development of housing and services for homeless individuals and those with disabilities. In closing, we must continue to strive to do all that we can to interrupt the cycles of poverty, isolation and stigma. We must continue to find the ways and means to provide safe and decent housing to all, regardless of income, gender, race, ethnicity or health status. Thank you.

Suzanne L. Bissonette, JD
Executive Director