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The Mental Health Association of New York City, National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City, and Mental Health Association of Nassau County Call on Governor Paterson to Sign Veterans Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Act

New York, NY – August 23, 2010 – The Mental Health Association of New York City, the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City, and the Mental Health Association of Nassau County today called on Governor David Paterson to sign the Veterans Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Act, which was approved by both houses of the New York State Legislature in June. It was transmitted to the Governor on August 18th, and he has 10 days (not including Sundays) to sign or veto it.

The Act (A11098/S7961) would require the State to develop a comprehensive long-term plan to address a range of issues facing “veterans and their families who are experiencing mental health or substance abuse problems.” The plan would address the need for accessible housing, unemployment, the high risk of suicide, the special needs of female veterans, peer outreach and support programs, as well as essential treatment services.

The chairmen of the veterans, mental health and substance abuse committees in the Assembly and the Senate have determined that the bill will have no cost to the State. The plan called for in the bill would be developed now, so that when the economy turns around, the State will be ready to expand services.

Veterans returning to civilian life from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from tragically high rates of mental and substance use disorders. They are twice as likely as the general population to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression or substance abuse; have twice the risk of suicide; are more than twice as likely to be homeless, and 20% more likely to be unemployed.

Their families also suffer: the strain during deployment is tremendous, and the return of the veterans requires great adaptation. Marriages too often collapse, and children are at increased risk of experiencing emotional difficulties and struggling in school. More than half of veterans and their families do not get help to deal with their emotional challenges.

“This Act would provide crucial support for the one million veterans in New York State and many millions more family members of veterans,” said Giselle Stolper, Executive Director of the Mental Health Association of New York City, which co-sponsors the Veterans’ Mental Health Coalition of New York City. “We urge Governor Paterson to sign it quickly. Our veterans deserve it.”

“We strongly support legislation to ensure that quality mental health services are available to veterans and their families,” said Wendy Brennan, Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness

of New York City. “This bill deserves the Governor’s support. We urge him to sign it, so that needed planning can get underway.”

“The war in Afghanistan recently surpassed Vietnam as the longest war in U.S. history. We are truly at a tipping point in regards to the care of our veterans,” said John Javis, Director of Special Projects for the Mental Health Association of Nassau County and chair of the Veterans Health Alliance of Long Island. “They served our country. It is now time for the community to serve them.”

***The Mental Health Association of New York City (MHA-NYC)** is a nonprofit organization that addresses mental health needs in New York City and across the nation. It is a local organization with national impact and has a three-part mission of services, advocacy and education. MHA-NYC identifies unmet needs and develops culturally sensitive programs to improve the lives of individuals and families affected by mental illness while promoting the importance of mental health. www.mhaofnyc.org*

***The National Alliance on Mental Illness of New York City (NAMI-NYC Metro)** is a grassroots organization that provides support, education, and advocacy for families and individuals of all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds who live with mental illness. As one of the largest affiliates of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, we work collaboratively with our state and national affiliates, and with other stakeholders in the community to educate the public, advocate for legislation, reduce stigma, and improve the mental health system. For more information, visit www.naminycmetro.org.*

***The Mental Health Association of Nassau County (MHA of NC)** is a not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to improving mental health through advocacy, education, program development and the delivery of direct services. www.mhanc.org*

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