

NASW-NYS Political Post

April 4, 2008

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A Few Day's Late and Many Millions Short - It's often been said around the halls of the Capitol that there are two things you don't want to watch...one being the process of making sausage and the other very similar process of making legislation, or in this case (pun intended) the budget. And this year, it's been especially difficult to witness. As budget bills get passed, lobbyists / advocates and the programs they support have been squealing in pain as funding has been slashed across the board. As of press time, the fate of funding for our Veteran's Mental Health Training Initiative was still up in the air, however, in spite of significant cuts throughout the health and mental health budget for fiscal year 2008-9, social workers did yield a substantial victory this week when the Health and Mental Hygiene budget included reimbursement to social workers providing psychotherapy services to persons under 19 years old and pregnant women of any age in Article 28 clinics. Previous law only allowed such reimbursement for Article 28s that were also Federally Qualified Health Centers, thus omitting reimbursement for important youth populations who sought mental health services through social workers in School Based Health Centers. A special thanks to Lara Kassel of Medicaid Matters in New York (MMNY) for her support on this initiative and our very own Lenora Colaruotolo of the Genesee Valley Division, chair of the CNLI committee for representing NASW-NYS at a press conference on this topic in Rochester with Commissioner of Health, Dr. Richard Daines.

Casualties and Choices - Funding for geriatric mental health services was slashed, an initiative to raise the basic welfare grant \$29 for a family of three (a program that hasn't seen an increase in 18 years) was deemed "unaffordable" and several programs for the homeless were cut, however, two "underutilized juvenile detention facilities that were slated for closure will remain open at a cost to taxpayers of over \$5 million in yearly salaries plus an estimated \$12 million in renovation costs, according to people familiar with budget negotiations." Hmmm.

Campaign Chatter - Senators Clinton and Obama will each continue to spend a lot of time in Pennsylvania over the next several weeks, as Senator Clinton works to hold her double digit lead and Senator Obama attempts to chip away at it. Meanwhile, Senator McCain, with no clear opponent at the moment, has spent the last several weeks packing his schedule with fundraisers, meet and greets, and most recently a visit to his old high school where he touted his "Troops to Teachers" proposal to encourage veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan to go into the classroom."