The cuts to children’s mental health care!

Troy is an 11-year-old boy with behavioral problems and learning disabilities that began when he was very young. When his family was evicted from their apartment and moved far from the doctor who had been managing his medications, Troy went into crisis. He was hospitalized after he attacked a younger sibling and ran away from home. After his discharge, Troy began receiving specialized services in his home and school, including support for his mother and weekly respite care, which allows him to get one-on-one attention while his parents focus on their other children. With help, Troy is thriving; he is back on his medication, attending therapy regularly, and passing all his classes in school.

Sarah is a 17-year-old girl who was sexually abused in early childhood and later diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and PTSD. After she quit going to therapy, she attempted suicide and was hospitalized. When she came home, Sara began receiving therapeutic services at home and in school, where a counselor helps her to connect with her peers. Now, Sarah’s grades are back up and she’s thinking about college.

High quality mental health and substance abuse services can save young people’s lives.

We know what works. In the last decade, experts have developed innovative, evidence-based models of prevention, treatment, and clinical care, but they are out of reach of the vast majority of children who need them. Across the state, more than 50% of kids and adolescents with a behavioral health condition do not receive necessary treatment, including 60% of young people with major depression.

Since 2011, New York State has promised to fill these gaps. As part of its Medicaid redesign program, the State created new services that offered real hope for children: Providers would be able to identify mental health problems early and step in with evidence-based interventions. Specialists would meet with parents and children together, helping to keep families intact. Services would begin to reach very young children, addressing trauma and other challenges before they develop into long-term problems.

Crucially, the State promised to reduce wait times for services and to make many more children eligible. According to early estimates, more than 200,000 children would be eligible for the new Children and Family Treatment and Support Services (CFTSS). By 2022, the State predicted that over 30,000 children would receive the more intensive Home and Community Based Services (HCBS), up from the 7,000 slots available in the past.

New Yorkers were promised more services. Instead, the State is taking vital resources away.

In reality, these vitally important services are reaching just a tiny fraction of the children who need them. Because of the State’s unfulfilled promises, parents, advocates, and providers report that children continue to wait for weeks or even months to get the help they need—wait times that can represent a lifetime for a child in crisis.

Rather than providing the support needed to expand, the State has announced that it will end the start-up rate enhancement for Children and Family Treatment and Support Services at the end of this year. The consequences will be devastating: Fewer services, even longer waits, and more children in need.

Ample research shows that investing in kids pays off, averting hospitalizations and saving taxpayers millions of dollars in foster care, special education, and the justice system. The State must keep its promise to children and families.

No more cuts to mental health services for children!