

November 17, 2023

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
New York State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Re: A.5119 (Gunther)/S.5178 (Brouk)

Dear Governor Hochul:

On behalf of the membership of LeadingAge New York, I am writing to urge you to sign bill number A.5119 (Gunther)/S.5178 (Brouk), which passed the Legislature with overwhelming bipartisan support and would help ensure New York's older adult mental health housing residents the opportunity to age safely in place.

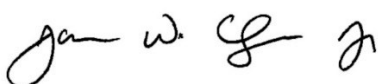
There are more than 40,000 New Yorkers with severe mental illness (SMI) living in community-based mental health housing models which were developed nearly 40 years ago and, unfortunately, have not evolved to meet the changing needs of residents as they have aged in place. According to data collected by the Association of Community Living, Inc. (ACL), more than 40 percent of New York's mental health housing residents are now aged 55 and over, with nearly 33 percent of those aged 65 and over. These residents experience a significant number of aging-related health conditions, including dementia and mobility issues. However, mental health housing providers are ill-equipped to meet residents' aging-related needs and, conversely, many assisted living providers and nursing homes do not have the resources or expertise to address all of the behavioral health needs of individuals with SMI.

This legislation would establish a task force to examine these systems and make recommendations about how to holistically address the needs of some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers living in housing settings overseen by the Office of Mental Health and to ensure their opportunity to age safely in place. By advancing this low-cost, exploratory proposal now, the State would be truly proactive in defining the most appropriate and sustainable systems to serve the full spectrum of aging New Yorkers – including those with SMI.

While the Master Plan for Aging (MPA) process is laudable, early recommendations are being developed too slowly to address the critical needs of special populations in a timely manner, and this issue is too complex to fully flesh out in the MPA. The establishment of this task force is an immediate first step consistent with the overarching goals of the MPA, and the resulting research and recommendations would ultimately support the development of proposals that could be taken up in the MPA to help meet the goal of ensuring a sufficient supply of affordable, accessible housing in all communities that is reflective of the continuum of care needs.

For these reasons, I strongly urge your approval of bill A.5119 (Gunther)/S.5178 (Brouk) to support the safe and healthy aging of the older adults who rely on New York's mental health housing.

Sincerely,



James W. Clyne, Jr.  
President & CEO  
LeadingAge New York