



New York State Occupational Therapy Association

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Memorandum of Support

New York State Executive Budget and Article VII

The New York State Occupational Therapy Association supports the following proposals.

Education

Expand Part-Time Students' Access to TAP.

The Expand Part-Time Students' Access to TAP budget proposal would include \$150 million to expand the TAP program to cover students who are taking 6 or more credit hours at SUNY, CUNY, and non-for-profit independent universities in NYS. This would include 75,000 additional students annually, including those with disabilities who are not taking a full course load and therefore do not currently qualify for TAP, thereby enabling them to receive funding and participate in university learning on a part-time basis.

By allowing students to participate in higher education opportunities more individuals, including students with disabilities, will be able to work towards degrees and engage in meaningful work experiences that benefit both individuals and society. Occupational therapy supports participation in all contexts, and many students do not have the ability to fund a part-time education or successfully manage a full course load. This proposal benefits many of the students that occupational therapy works with, and therefore we support this proposal.

Repeal TAP Prohibition for Incarcerated Individuals.

In 1995, a New York State law prohibited incarcerated people from being eligible to receive State financial aid. The Executive Budget repeals the prohibition against using TAP in prisons.

This issue is critical for low-income individuals preparing for re-entry into the community. Allowing eligibility to TAP will give low-income incarcerated individuals access to financial assistance needed to receive education to transform their futures post-incarceration. In addition, access to education will help those individuals obtain meaningful work post-incarceration and contribute to their communities. The occupational therapy profession believes in equity for all persons. Repealing the TAP prohibition for incarcerated individuals provides educational equity for all, promoting higher education as a component of rehabilitation.

Universal pre-K program Renewed

The Executive Budget proposes renewing state funding for universal pre-kindergarten services. NYSOTA supports this proposal.

Early childhood education services build a strong foundation in social, pre-academic, and general life skills that will give children a leg up in school and beyond. Research shows that children who receive preschool services have improved academic readiness.

Foundation Aid. Foundation Aid is the State's main education operating aid formula. It is focused on allocating State funds equitably to all school districts, especially high-need districts, based on student need, community wealth, and regional cost differences. The Executive Budget provides a \$1.6 billion (8.1 percent) increase in Foundation Aid, supporting the second year of the three-year phase in of full funding of the current Foundation Aid formula and ensuring each school district receives a minimum year-to-year increase of 3 percent.

By fully funding the Foundation Aid, the racial and economic inequity in public school education may be better addressed. The increased funding for public schools based on student need, community wealth, and regional cost differences, will reduce the educational opportunity gap and provide more children in low-income school districts with greater opportunities for educational and occupational success.

Pre-school Special Education.

The Division of the Budget will administratively authorize a cost-living adjustment of 11% for the SY 2023 tuition rates, increasing providers' annual funding by more than \$240 million. The State will reimburse roughly 60% of cost which is usually paid first by school districts and counties. This will benefit preschoolers with disabilities and their families because some children are not receiving services due to inadequate reimbursement rates. Occupational therapy works with preschoolers with disabilities to help work on their developmental needs.

There are a growing number of preschoolers with disabilities who have a legal right to a preschool special education program under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, but who are going without the services they need because inadequate reimbursement rates have created a shortage of these vital programs.

Occupational therapy in a preschool setting work together with teachers and parents to improve a child's cognitive, motor, and communication skills. They may also address issues to help children develop play and sensory processing skills.

Health

Telehealth Parity

The Article VII Health bill proposes telehealth parity, that health care services provided by telehealth shall be reimbursed at the same rate as services provided in person. NYSOTA supports this proposal.

Tele-health parity helps insure more adequate coverage for health care provided by telehealth methods, removing barriers to accessing necessary healthcare.

The use of telehealth as a service delivery model is utilized by occupational therapy for early intervention, health care and special education.

Green House nursing home

The Green House nursing home initiative will provide \$50 million in funding to support the implementation of an innovative care model to reduce reliance on traditional institutional settings and increase residential nursing frameworks where residents both live and receive care within small group homes.

Making the transition into skilled nursing facilities is difficult for older adults and their families, and the pandemic has made large groups of at-risk individuals living communally dangerous for older adults as well as those that care for them. Funding to support group homes for older adults will increase safety, allow individuals

to be cared for with dignity in their final days, and facilitate care in residential settings with which they are familiar.

Occupational therapists work with older adults to support independence as well as help individuals age in place, which is proven to maintain safety and independence for seniors within a familiar setting. Increasing funding for the Green House Nursing Home program aligns with occupational therapy values of maintaining the independence of seniors to the extent possible.

Enhance Children's Mental Health Programs.

The Enhance Children's Mental Health Programs budget proposal would invest 7.5 million dollars in Residential Treatment Facilities (RTFs) for children and continue expanding other children's community mental health services. In addition, behavioral health services will continue to be integrated into primary care provider visits through the HealthySteps program, increasing children and family's access to mental health services.

Children's mental health affects their development and ability to cope, ultimately impacting function in all contexts of their lives, including home, school and communities in the present and future. The profession of occupational therapy supports this proposal due to our distinct role in working with children, including lifespan development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills impacted by mental health.

Programs for All-inclusive Care of the Elderly (PACE) The Executive Budget proposes establishing to the Programs for All-inclusive Care of the Elderly (PACE). The proposal includes a wide breadth of medically necessary services, including occupational therapy.

With an increasing aging population, there will be more older adults living in the community who will need services such as PACE. Occupational therapy services are essential for this population because they can work with caregivers to improve physical and cognitive abilities so that the older adult can perform meaningful daily tasks.