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New York City Council
Oversight – Mental Health Involuntary Removals and Mayor
Adams' Recently Announced Plan

February 6th, 2023

My name is Dr. Jeremy Kidd. I am an addiction psychiatrist at Columbia University and am submitting testimony today as president of the New York County Psychiatric Society (NYCPS), an organization representing over 1600 psychiatrists in NYC. Our members work in outpatient clinics, inpatient hospitals, emergency departments, jails, prisons, and homeless shelters.

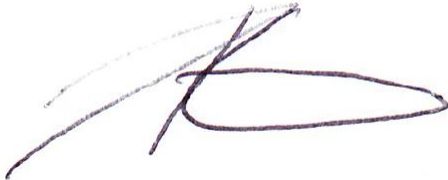
We wish to voice our concerns about the Mayor's Mental Health Involuntary Removals directive. While we acknowledge that the housing and mental health crises in our city require immediate action, we believe that this directive inappropriately over-relies on the NYPD and does not adequately address the root causes of homelessness or untreated mental illness. This directive fails to address the shortage of safe, affordable, supported housing and the lack of outpatient mental health treatment. We are advocating for the Mayor to re-evaluate this policy and to consider reallocating resources to areas that will result in demonstrable benefit to unhoused people with mental illness. We hope that City Council will help provide much needed oversight in the following three areas:

1. NY State law already dictates that people can be admitted involuntarily to hospitals if they have a diagnosable psychiatric illness and are at risk of harming themselves or others *due to that illness*. However, when poverty and homelessness are the primary contributors to someone's inability to care for themselves, psychiatric hospitalization is not clinically warranted. The City Council can provide oversight to ensure that due process and civil rights are protected.
2. Inpatient psychiatric bed capacity in NYC is severely limited. This shortage was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic as private hospitals converted psychiatric beds to medical and surgical units. In many cases, hospitals seized this opportunity to permanently close psychiatric inpatient units. Our members working in emergency departments report that patients who need psychiatric hospitalization frequently wait hours or even days for a bed. The 50 additional inpatient psychiatric beds the administration announced are woefully inadequate to meet this need. The City Council can help by tracking the impact of the Mayor's directive on emergency departments and wait-times for psychiatric hospitalization.

3. Unhoused people with mental illness need stable, affordable housing and access to community-based mental health care in a “housing first” model. Emergency detention and involuntary hospitalization provide neither of these. The current situation is the result of decades of deinstitutionalization and the unfulfilled promise that previously hospitalized individuals would receive access to robust outpatient services. Resources are required to increase supported and supportive housing and to expand the availability of ACT teams/FACT teams/IMT teams and Street Outreach teams. Another important focus is on prevention and early intervention programs like the OnTrackNY program, which provides comprehensive services (e.g., treatment, vocational support, educational support, housing assistance) to people with recent-onset psychosis. The goal of these programs is to prevent individuals with severe mental illness from becoming unhoused in the first place. The pre-pandemic shortage of psychiatrists has only gotten worse with many outpatient treatment programs unable to fill vacancies. City Council oversight can determine whether the Mayor’s directive has resulted in people gaining access to housing and outpatient care. We do not believe that it has or will.

In summary, we at the New York County Psychiatric Society (NYCPS) ask the City Council to ensure that the Mayor’s directive does not impede on the civil rights of unhoused individuals with mental illness and to monitor the impact of this directive on already crowded emergency rooms and overtaxed outpatient mental health services. We at NYCPS are happy to serve as a resource to the City Council and the Mayor’s Office in this process.

Thank you for your time and attention.
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Jeremy Kidd', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Jeremy Kidd, MD, MPH
President