STATE OF NEW YORK

8618

2025-2026 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

December 15, 2025

Introduced by Sen. CANZONERI-FITZPATRICK -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Rules

AN ACT to amend the mental hygiene law, in relation to establishing a transportation assistance voucher demonstration program for certain outpatient mental health and substance use disorder services

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Short title. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "behavioral health transportation access act".

§ 2. Legislative findings and purpose. The legislature finds that many New Yorkers receiving outpatient mental health and substance use disorder services lack access to reliable and affordable transportation and are ineligible for Medicaid-funded non-emergency medical transportation. Individuals with incomes modestly above Medicaid thresholds often incur significant transportation costs to attend therapy, counseling, medication management, and recovery services, resulting in missed appointments and early dropout from care. Such disruptions increase the likelihood of psychiatric crisis, overdose, relapse, hospitalization, and involvement with law enforcement, imposing substantial costs on the state and local communities.

The purpose of this act is to authorize the office of mental health, in consultation with the office of addiction services and supports, to establish a demonstration program providing transportation assistance vouchers to eligible individuals attending outpatient behavioral health appointments, in order to promote continuity of care, reduce avoidable crises, and improve behavioral health outcomes.

§ 3. The mental hygiene law is amended by adding a new section 7.49 to read as follows:

§ 7.49 Transportation assistance voucher demonstration program.

(a) Definitions. As used in this section:

(1) "Eligible individual" means a resident of the state who:

EXPLANATION--Matter in *italics* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

LBD14212-01-5

(i) has a scheduled appointment at an outpatient mental health program licensed, operated, or funded by the office, or at an outpatient substance use disorder program certified, operated, or funded by the office of addiction services and supports;

(ii) has household income at or below two hundred fifty percent of the federal poverty level;

(iii) is not enrolled in the medical assistance program under title eleven of article five of the social services law and is not receiving non-emergency medical transportation benefits for such appointment; and

(iv) lacks access, as determined by the commissioner, to safe, reliable, no-cost transportation to and from such appointment.

(2) "Outpatient behavioral health program" means an outpatient program providing mental health or substance use disorder services that is licensed, operated, or funded by the office or by the office of addiction services and supports.

(3) "Transportation voucher" means a digital code, prepaid card, paper voucher, transit pass, or reimbursement mechanism redeemable only for transportation services authorized under this section.

(4) "Transportation services" means public transportation, including bus, subway, light rail, paratransit, or commuter rail; for-hire transportation including taxis, liveries, or rideshare services; and any other transportation modality approved by the commissioner.

(b) Establishment. The commissioner, within amounts appropriated and in consultation with the commissioner of addiction services and supports, shall establish a transportation assistance voucher demonstration program to provide round-trip transportation to eligible individuals for scheduled outpatient behavioral health appointments.

(c) Program design. (1) The demonstration program may be implemented directly by the office or through contracts or grant agreements with local governmental units or outpatient behavioral health programs.

(2) The commissioner may establish eligibility verification procedures, voucher issuance protocols, limits on voucher value or frequency, attendance confirmation requirements, and safeguards to prevent fraud or misuse.

(3) Vouchers shall be used solely for transportation to and from scheduled outpatient behavioral health appointments.

(d) Coordination with existing benefits. Individuals eligible for non-emergency medical transportation through the medical assistance program or any other public benefit shall not receive vouchers for the same appointments under this section. The commissioner shall establish procedures to prevent duplication of benefits.

(e) Outreach and administration. The office, in consultation with the office of addiction services and supports, shall develop guidance and materials to assist participating programs and local governmental units in identifying eligible individuals and administering vouchers.

(f) Data collection and evaluation. (1) The office shall collect data on participation, vouchers issued, appointment adherence, and such other outcome measures as the commissioner deems relevant.

(2) No later than three years after the effective date of this section, and annually thereafter while the demonstration program is operational, the commissioner shall submit a report to the governor and the legislature on program implementation, outcomes, and recommendations.

(g) Funding. The commissioner may use state appropriations, federal funds, local contributions, or private grants or donations for the

purposes of this section. Nothing in this section shall create an entitlement to transportation assistance.

(h) Confidentiality. All individually identifiable information collected pursuant to this section shall be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal confidentiality laws.

§ 4. The mental hygiene law is amended by adding a new section 19.46 to read as follows:

§ 19.46 Transportation assistance voucher demonstration program; coordination.

The office of addiction services and supports shall collaborate with the office of mental health in the implementation and evaluation of the transportation assistance voucher demonstration program established pursuant to section 7.49 of this chapter, and is authorized to enter into contracts, provide guidance, and collect data consistent with such implementation.

§ 5. This act shall take effect on the one hundred eightieth day after it shall have become a law; provided, however, that the office of mental health and the office of addiction services and supports are authorized to promulgate regulations and take any other measures necessary for implementation prior to such effective date.