

# *BestSelf Behavioral Health Advocacy Toolkit*

## A Message from BestSelf Behavioral Health

Dear Valued Community Members, Clients, and Employees,

At BestSelf Behavioral Health, we believe that access to quality mental health and substance use services is a fundamental right and the cornerstone of a thriving community. As your Chief Community Impact Officer, I am deeply committed to ensuring that every individual in Buffalo and Western New York has the support they need to live a full and healthy life.

We are providing you with this Nonpartisan Advocacy Toolkit because, together, our voices are incredibly powerful. ***Our behavioral health system is currently facing significant challenges, including potential federal Medicaid cuts and ongoing payment delays that threaten the vital services you and/or our clients rely on. It's crucial that our elected officials understand the real, human impact of these decisions.***

This toolkit offers simple, direct ways for you to share your personal story and demonstrate why investing in behavioral health is not just an expense, *but a wise investment in the future of our community*. BestSelf Behavioral Health stands with you, and we are unwavering in our commitment to advocating for policies and funding that protect and expand essential behavioral health care in our region.

Thank you for joining us in this critical effort. Your voice truly makes a difference.

With gratitude,

Chantele Campbell

Chief Community Impact Officer

BestSelf Behavioral Health

## Why Advocate for Behavioral Health?

- **Reduces Stigma:** Openly discussing and advocating for behavioral health helps break down stigmas and encourages individuals to seek help.
- **Improves Access:** Advocacy can lead to increased funding and resources, making services more accessible to those in need.
- **Strengthens Communities:** Healthy individuals contribute to a stronger, more vibrant community.
- **Informs Policy:** Sharing your experiences can influence policy decisions and improve the quality of care.

Behavioral health challenges affect people from all walks of life. By advocating for these crucial services, we can create a more supportive and inclusive Buffalo for everyone. Your voice can make a difference in ensuring that our community has access to the resources it needs to thrive.

Investing in behavioral health is not just a matter of individual well-being; it's an investment in the future of our community. When people have access to mental health care and substance use treatment, they are better able to participate in the workforce, raise healthy families, and contribute to civic life.



## How to Advocate

There are many ways to advocate for behavioral health:

- **Share Your Story:** Personal stories are powerful. Share your experiences with policymakers, community leaders, and the media. How have our services been supportive to you, your clients, your students, and your loved ones.
  - BestSelf Behavioral Health is collecting stories to help illustrate the local impact. Please share your experience directly by emailing [advocacy@bestselfwny.org](mailto:advocacy@bestselfwny.org). Stories will be shared without revealing names or other identifying details.
- **Contact Elected Officials:** Let your representatives know that behavioral health is a priority for you. (See details below.)
- **Support Organizations:** Volunteer or donate to organizations that provide behavioral health services and advocate for policy change.
- **Educate Others:** Talk to your friends, family, and colleagues about the importance of behavioral health.
- **Attend Community Events:** Participate in rallies, town hall meetings, and other events that raise awareness about behavioral health issues.
- **Write Letters to the Editor:** Share your thoughts on behavioral health issues in local newspapers and online platforms. (see tips for writing a personal letter or email)

## Who to Contact: Your Elected Officials

Connecting with your elected officials is a way to share your experiences and ensure they understand the local impact of healthcare policy decisions.

### **A. Federal Elected Officials (U.S. House of Representatives)**

Buffalo, NY (Erie County) falls primarily within New York's 23rd and 24th Congressional Districts. *Please verify your specific district if unsure.*

Representative Nicholas A. Langworthy (NY-23)

Party: Republican

Washington, DC Office: 422 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515

DC Phone: (202) 225-3161

Local Offices (Erie County):

Williamsville: 8201 Main St. Suite 13-14, Williamsville, NY 14221 (Phone: 716-547-6844)

Website (Contact Form): <https://langworthy.house.gov/contact>

Representative Claudia Tenney (NY-24)

Party: Republican

Washington, DC Office: 2230 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515

DC Phone: (202) 225-3665

Local Office (Niagara County, near Erie): Lockport: 169 Niagara Street, Lockport, NY 14094 (Phone: 716-514-5130)

Website (Contact Form): <https://tenney.house.gov/contact>

### **B. New York State Elected Officials**

Governor Kathy Hochul

Party: Democratic

Address: NYS State Capitol Building, Albany, NY 12224

Phone: 1-518-474-8390 (Office hours: 9:00am to 5:00pm)

Online Contact Form: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form>



### **NYS Senators (Erie County)**

Erie County is covered by several State Senate Districts. Here are some key Senators:

Senator Timothy M. Kennedy (Senate District 63)

Party: Democratic

District Office (Buffalo): 37 Franklin Street, Suite 550, Buffalo, NY 14202

District Phone: (716) 826-2683

Email: [kennedy@nysenate.gov](mailto:kennedy@nysenate.gov)

Senator Patrick Gallivan (Senate District 60)

Party: Republican

District Office (Elma): 2721 Transit Rd Suite 116, Elma NY 14059

District Phone: (716) 656-8544

Email Senator Gallivan: [gallivan@nysenate.gov](mailto:gallivan@nysenate.gov) or visit <https://www.nysenate.gov/senators/patrick-m-gallivan/contact>

Senator April Baskin (Senate District 60)

Party: Democratic

District Office (Buffalo): 40 La Riviere, Suite 121, Buffalo, NY 14202

District Phone: (716) 826-2683

Email: [Baskin@nysenate.gov](mailto:Baskin@nysenate.gov) or visit <https://www.nysenate.gov/senators/april-baskin/contact>

To find your specific NYS Senator, you can use the "Find My Senator" tool on the NYS Senate website: <https://www.nysenate.gov/find-my-senator>

### ***NYS Assembly Members (Erie County)***

Erie County is covered by numerous Assembly Districts. Here are a few prominent ones that cover parts of Erie County:

Assemblymember William Conrad (Assembly District 140)

Party: Democratic

District Office (Tonawanda): 34 Peuquet Parkway, Tonawanda, NY 14150

District Phone: (716) 873-2540

Email: [conradw@nyassembly.gov](mailto:conradw@nyassembly.gov)

Assemblymember Patrick Burke (Assembly District 142)

Party: Democratic

District Office (West Seneca): 3686 Seneca Street, West Seneca, NY 14224

District Phone: (716) 608-6099

Email: [burkep@nyassembly.gov](mailto:burkep@nyassembly.gov)

Assemblymember Paul A. Bologna (Assembly District 144)

Party: Republican

District Office (Clarence): 8180 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14221

District Phone: (716) 839-4691

Email: [bolognap@nyassembly.gov](mailto:bolognap@nyassembly.gov)

To find your specific NYS Assembly Member, you can use the "Find My Assembly Member" tool on the NYS Assembly website: <https://nyassembly.gov/mem/search/>

## Tips for Writing a Personal Letter or Email

When contacting your elected officials, your personal story is the most powerful tool. Focus on how these issues affect *you* and *your community*.

- **Be Concise and Clear:** Get straight to the point. Busy officials and their staff appreciate clear, brief communication.
- **Share Your Personal Story:** This is crucial! Instead of general statements, explain how proposed Medicaid cuts or delays in payment for behavioral health services could affect:
  - **Your access to care:** (e.g., "If these cuts go through, I'm concerned I won't be able to afford my therapy sessions," or "My child's wait time for services could get even longer.")
  - **Your family:** (e.g., "My family relies on Medicaid to cover my elderly parent's mental health support.")
  - **Your work/employees:** (if you are an employee or employer in the sector, e.g., "As a behavioral health professional, these cuts would jeopardize jobs at my clinic and reduce our ability to serve patients.")
  - **Your community:** (e.g., "Our community's safety net for mental health is already stretched thin; further cuts would be devastating for our most vulnerable residents.")
- **Focus on Impact, Not Demands:** Instead of telling them how to vote on a bill, explain the *consequences* of inaction or specific policy decisions. For example, rather than "Vote no on the bill," try "I urge you to consider the severe impact these proposed cuts will have on my access to mental health services and the well-being of our community."
- **Be Respectful and Professional:** Even if you feel strongly, a respectful tone is more effective.
- **Include Your Contact Information:** Always include your full name, address, and phone number so they know you are a constituent.
- **Proofread:** Ensure your message is free of typos and grammatical errors.
- **One Issue Per Letter (Ideally):** If you have multiple concerns, consider sending separate communications to keep each message focused.

### Example Opening (Customize!):

*"Dear [Senator/Representative Last Name],*

*I am writing to you as a concerned constituent from [Your Town/City, e.g., Buffalo] in [Your County, e.g., Erie County]. I am deeply concerned about the proposed federal Medicaid cuts and their potential impact on behavioral health services in our community."*

### Example Closing:

*"Thank you for your time and for considering my perspective on this critical issue. I urge you to prioritize the behavioral health needs of your constituents."*

*Sincerely,*

*[Your Name]*  
*[Your Address]*

[Your Address]

[Your Phone Number/Email (Optional)]

## Talking Points: Why Behavioral Health Access Matters

These points can be used in your letters, emails, or conversations to convey the importance of strong behavioral health services.

- **Access is Life-Saving:** Timely access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment saves lives by preventing crises, overdose deaths, and suicides.
- **Impact on Overall Health:** Behavioral health is integral to overall physical health. Untreated mental health conditions can worsen chronic physical illnesses.
- **Economic Impact:** Strong behavioral health services reduce emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and involvement with the justice system, leading to significant cost savings for the healthcare system and taxpayers.
- **Community Well-being:** Accessible behavioral healthcare strengthens communities by supporting healthy families, stable employment, and reduced homelessness and crime.
- **Vulnerable Populations:** Medicaid is a lifeline for many low-income individuals, children, seniors, and people with disabilities who rely on it for essential behavioral health services. Cuts disproportionately harm these vulnerable groups.
- **Workforce Stability:** Proposed cuts directly threaten the jobs of dedicated behavioral health professionals in our community and the financial viability of clinics and agencies that provide essential services.
- **Existing Challenges:** Our behavioral health system already faces challenges, including workforce shortages, long wait times, and persistent underfunding. Further cuts or payment delays will exacerbate these issues.
- **Local Impact:** In Erie County alone, there are numerous OMH and OASAS providers serving thousands of individuals. Proposed federal healthcare cuts could impact hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for our region. Proposed federal healthcare cuts could impact over **\$500 million in federal funding for the NY-23 district and over \$350 million for the NY-24 district**, directly affecting services in our communities.
- **Investment, Not Expense:** Investing in behavioral health services is a wise public investment that yields returns in healthier citizens, stronger communities, and reduced long-term costs.

## Next Steps

1. **Identify Your Priorities:** What behavioral health issues are most important to you and your community?
2. **Choose Your Advocacy Methods:** Which advocacy strategies are you most comfortable with?
3. **Take Action:** Start contacting elected officials, sharing your story, and supporting relevant organizations.
4. **Stay Informed:** Keep up-to-date on behavioral health policy developments and continue to advocate for change.

5. **Let Us Know:** Are you a member of or participate in any local advocacy groups, task forces, boards, etc.? Let us know! Your feedback helps us track the collective impact of our advocacy efforts and informs our ongoing strategy. Email [advocacy@bestselfwny.org](mailto:advocacy@bestselfwny.org)
6. **Stay Informed:** BestSelf is a member of both the National Council for Well Being and the NYS Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. You can stay informed by visiting their websites: <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/get-involved/be-an-advocate/> and <https://nyscouncil.org/policy-budget-agenda/>

## Do's and Don'ts

- Remember your decision to participate in any outlined advocacy efforts is completely at your own discretion with no affiliation with or support of any particular political party, elected official, candidate or their team members. These efforts are nonpartisan efforts intended to inform decision makers about the value of our services.
- When writing letters or sending emails, please use your personal email and mailing address.
- All employees must adhere to BestSelf's Code of Conduct when identifying one's self as an employee of the organization in writing or via other forms of media.
- Advocacy efforts should not take place during your scheduled work hours unless these activities are a part of your normal job responsibilities.