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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer to the New York City Council Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and Disability Services

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I am Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and I would like to thank the committee and Chair Cohen for allowing me to speak today on the structure, implementation, and impact of *ThriveNYC: A Mental Health Roadmap for All*. I am particularly concerned about mental health services for our youngest residents.

For many years, I have had a deep-seated interest in school based mental health services. During my time on the City Council I was a member of the Committee on Mental Health. As Borough President, last spring I held a forum on healthy relationships- and we focused specifically on teen dating violence; and this past fall, I held a school-based mental health round table, where I gathered school administrators, providers, academics and non-profits to talk about school-based mental health services. We discussed ways to expand access to culturally appropriate mental health services to more students. Currently, we know that 237,000 children under 18 in New York City have diagnosable mental health conditions, yet, tragically, the city's mental health programs can only support 12% of those between ages 5 and 17.

I commend the administration for making mental health care a top priority, especially in our schools. When the Mayor and the Department of Education announced the Community Schools and School Renewal Program (SRP) last summer, I was so pleased to see the inclusion of culturally appropriate mental health services, but I have some concerns about implementation.

First, from my conversations with school administrators, it has come to my attention that social workers provided to schools in the SRP are not allowed to work with students with IEPs, the assumption being that students with IEPs are already getting mandated services. We know this is not true. In my time on the Council, and now as Borough President, I have heard from countless parents, teachers and advocates just how difficult it is for students with IEPs to get mandated services. The SRP was introduced to address these gaps, not to perpetuate them. In schools serving high percentages of students with IEPs, the need for school based mental health services is even greater, so why not allow social

workers to work with all students in need? Further, each school based social worker that has been added as a part of the *Roadmap* should partner with one of our schools of Social Work in the city to provide placements for social work students, so we can provide even more support to all students.

Next, I'd like to comment on the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Department of Education hiring 100 School Mental Health Consultants as part of the *ThriveNYC* plan. While it is great that schools will be getting crucial needs-assessments and resources about how to connect with existing agency resources, I know the most useful resource a student in need can have is a person to talk to. This is where we have to be creative about how we do that- and again I think social work interns can play a role. Currently in order for schools to be able to have social work interns on site, the school must have a licensed social worker on staff to provide guidance and support. For schools that do not have the resources to hire a licensed social worker, I think it is important that we figure out how to facilitate a combination of school based and off-site management, so that schools can still have access to an intern pool to help meet students' day to day needs, not just the needs that become apparent in emergency and crisis situations.

The mental health needs of New York City students are too important to leave unaddressed, and we must be creative in finding solutions. I look forward to continuing to work with schools, teachers, providers, the Council and the Administration to address these issues.