Mental health providers join call for federal pandemic aid

Amanda Fries

ALBANY - Mental health and substance abuse service providers have joined the chorus of calls to federal lawmakers to provide financial relief to state and local governments in light of millions of dollars in state payments being withheld.
Service providers were alerted in late June that their third-quarter payments from the state would be reduced by 20 percent as New York grapples with a multi-billion-dollar deficit caused by the response and ramifications of the coronavirus pandemic. They argued the community-based programs provide stable housing and support for individuals at a lower cost than other options, thus funding them adequately saves money in the long run.

U.S. Rep. Paul Tonko joined industry leaders Thursday for a virtual news conference calling for more federal assistance, which service providers say are necessary to ensure the withholdings do not become permanent resulting in layoffs of essential workers, service cuts and the evictions of hundreds of vulnerable New Yorkers.

The Democratic congressman championed the Heroes Act, passed by the House in May, as the stimulus package that provides a “wholesome” response to the devastation brought upon localities from COVID-19 while ensuring dignity to those who rely on the essential services facing cuts.