



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

## Harckham Convenes Suicide Prevention Round Table

PETE HARCKHAM September 26, 2024

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*Somers, NY* - New York State Senator Pete Harckham hosted a Suicide Prevention Roundtable on Wednesday, Sept. 25, during National Suicide Prevention Month, at the Somers Library that brought together leaders from local nonprofits and government agencies to address the

alarming rise in suicide rates nationwide and explore effective prevention strategies.

“The mental health crisis in our communities is a pressing issue that requires a multi-faceted approach,” said Harckham. “There is no ‘quick fix’ or ‘one size fits all’ solution. That’s why it’s essential for everyone to come together, share insights, and collaborate. Thank you to all who joined us for this important dialogue on enhancing our statewide and local support systems.”

Over the course of the roundtable gathering, participants discussed current barriers to providing treatment to those in need, areas of the existing state and local support systems that are working and ways to improve their efficacy.

“Thank you to everyone that participated in yesterday’s roundtable,” said **Westchester County Legislator Erika Pierce**. “As someone whose family has been impacted by suicide, I truly value everyone who is engaged on this critical issue. Yesterday’s conversation was an important opportunity to hear new ideas on how to fight back against the suicide epidemic and to hear data supporting recent efforts at both the county and state level.”

One program that received praise from the mental health professionals present at the roundtable was the effectiveness of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline; how the state can continue to raise public awareness about this service was part of the general discussion.

“We should all take heart that good people are working to keep our neighbors safe and healthy, and consequently, there’s good news to share,” said **Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health Commissioner Michael Orth**. “We’ve had more than 20,000 calls through 988. By having that number, getting the word out, and offering a local response, we’re saving lives. Anything we can do to make sure people know there’s help available.”

“Our conversation was all about how to save lives,” said Putnam County Department of Social Services and Mental Health Commissioner Sara Servadio. “We used to get one crisis call a week and now it is eight a day. Suicide is not a personal failing. It’s a systemic failure and we need to take it seriously. We need to do everything to get all our first responders comprehensively trained and mental health clinics open in every school.”

Other topics discussed were the effectiveness of Crisis Emergency Response Teams (CERTs), the need for more climb deterrent fencing on area bridges and ongoing legislative efforts to provide resources to mental health providers.

**Marie Considine, Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Westchester**, said, “As we conclude Suicide Prevention Month, we need to empathize with those who have taken their lives and their families who lost their loved ones to suicide, as well as those first responders who are impacted by this trauma, and rededicate ourselves to ensuring that no one goes through that pain. Every student should have a mental health education to equip them to face life’s challenges and know when to get help either for themselves or someone else in need. Moreover, in a diverse state like New York, we must have culturally competent programming that can reach all our communities.”

**Child Advocacy Center of Putnam County Director Marla Behler** said, “Suicide prevention is not just a statistic; it’s a matter of life and death for our youth and community. I am grateful to Senator Harckham for including us in this vital conversation and his unwavering support. While we’ve made strides in reducing youth suicides in Putnam County, we must continue to address mental health needs and break the stigma surrounding these discussions. Together, we can create an environment where everyone feels valued and empowered to seek help.”

**Guardian Revival Program Executive Director Megan Castellano** said, “We lose 22 Veterans to suicide each day and more first responders, both fire and law enforcement, die by suicide

than in line of duty deaths. We will continue our prevention efforts and thank Senator Harckham for his support.”

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Hudson Valley / Westchester Chapter Area Director Maria Idoni** said, “Suicide is a fundamentally impulsive act. One of the key risk factors for suicide is access to lethal means. If a method of suicide is not readily available to a person in crisis, they might give up on the act altogether and survive. Timing is key to preventing suicide. That’s why it’s so important that we have preventative measures like means restriction fencing on area bridges and do everything we can to keep lethal instruments like firearms out of the hands of people in crisis.”

Also participating in the roundtable were Roy and Lucille Etere, both board members of NAMI, Putnam Chapter; and Lorraine Lein, a suicide prevention advocate.