



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Fighting Stigma and Raising Awareness During Mental Health Month

PATTY RITCHIE May 17, 2019



# May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Recently, a group of students from the Phoenix Central School District came to Albany for a very special visit. These students, led by their teachers Carol Blackburn and Colleen Longley, had earlier come up with an idea to better help young people discuss, understand and even cope with mental health issues they may face.

Their idea was the driving force behind a bill I sponsored (S5860A), which ensures New York State Universities, community colleges and city universities are provided with educational

materials on depression and suicide prevention. In January, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed that bill into law. In addition to educational materials, the new law also addresses the need for a postvention plan in partnership with a behavioral health provider in the community to support family members, friends, professionals and peers in the wake of a loved one's suicide.

The advocacy of these educators and their students is truly inspiring. It goes to show that taking an active role in the issues that affect them and their peers, can make a true difference in so many lives. While they were in Albany, I was able to present the class with the "pen certificate," which commemorates the signing of the bill into law.

The fact is millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental illness. During the month of May, the entire nation comes together to raise awareness of mental health issues, fight the stigmas and educate the public for through "National Mental Health Awareness Month."

This year, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) launched the 'WhyCare?' campaign. It is an opportunity for every single American to talk about mental health concerns in their lives and relationships. NAMI believes demonstrating how and why we care, can make a life-changing impact on those around us.

During this special month, I hope that you will reach out to someone you know who may be struggling with mental health, or even just share the NAMI website, <https://www.nami.org/>, with your family, friends, classmates and co-workers. As a reminder, if you or a loved one is struggling with thoughts of suicide, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can be reached at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

The more we show we care, like the students of the Phoenix Central School District, the better we will all be. During National Mental Health Awareness Month, I hope you will do you your part to raise awareness of mental health issues.