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LEGISLATIVE WOMEN'S CAUCUS

July 17, 2024

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

I am writing to ask that you strongly consider signing S3587A/A7188, which would establish a rural suicide prevention council, into law.

As you know, mental health and access to mental health care services is an issue throughout our state. However, these issues are especially pronounced in rural areas of New York like those that I represent. Beyond that, challenges such as substance abuse and the opioid crisis make this an issue we must fully address.

A 2023 study by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago found that the average suicide rate in New York's rural counties was more than twice that of urban counties. Previous analysis by the New York State Office of Mental Health similarly found that suicide rates in the most rural counties of New York were about 2.3 times higher than those in the most urban counties in 2021.

This alarming trend is attributable to an array of factors, many of which are specific to rural communities. For instance, economic trends, service access and delivery barriers, distance from healthcare providers, and availability of transportation, differ significantly between rural and urban communities and can contribute to an increased risk of suicide.

Because rural communities in New York face unique challenges, we must focus on finding solutions specifically tailored to decreasing the risk of suicide in these areas. Establishing a rural suicide prevention council is a step toward identifying these solutions and will bring together local public health officials, mental health professionals, and other experts as well as rural community members, to accomplish this goal.

For these reasons, I urge you to strongly consider signing S3587A/A7188 into law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pamela A. Helming".

Pamela A. Helming  
State Senator, 54th District

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