

My name is Joe Tobia and I am a 67 year old retired Educational Administrator from the Corning-Painted Post School District, currently serving as a Legislator for Steuben County. I am requesting the opportunity to speak before the Committee on Mental Hygiene (Health) in regards to NYS Bill s3587, the creation of the Rural Suicide Prevention Council. NYS Bill s3587 was first proposed in 2021 and finally passed in both the Senate (61-0) and Assembly (140-0) in June, 2024, only to be vetoed by Governor Hochul in November, 2024. This council would investigate a number of issues surrounding suicide deaths, including identifying barriers to Mental Health treatment and substance use treatment. It would also look at the path an individual took prior to their death, and determine what barriers prevented them from receiving the care and needed services to continue to live.

My son, Matt, died by suicide in 2021. For the last 2 years of his life, my wife and I had a "front row seat" to the many denials and barriers he faced while not receiving the care and services he so badly needed to lessen his pain and suffering. He received so little but needed so much. You see, we could have learned a great deal from my sons death by looking at the barriers that were denied to him. We need desperately a committee/council to examine the paths these individuals took in the last year or so of their lives.

For the past year and a half, I pushed hard to advocate for this bill....sending many emails, messages, faxes, and leaving voice mails to anyone and everyone who was remotely connected to Bill s3587. My push and advocacy for such a committee/council to be created will not end....I truly believe in my heart that a council/committee of this kind will save lives. In 2022, the State of Maryland passed PL94, which was a Suicide Fatality Review Committee, the only one of its kind in the country, to identify contributing factors, investigate interventions, and make improvements where needed. I now look at the veto from our Governor as a good thing, a chance to make NYS Bill s3587 better and more in line with Marylands bill, which is now more than 2 years underway. I have a few recommendations to pass on to help make this bill successful and well worth the time and money (which is low cost). To examine the services these individuals had prior to their death, services they did not have, services they should have had, and/or the reasoning why they never received the

services available, can only allow us make the changes in our systems to lessen the chances of suicide. There are many individuals in our state that are currently suffering everyday like my son did.....that is exactly why we must create a Committee to look at why we failed these people and where along their paths could we have stepped in and saved them!

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion. I truly hope you will give me the chance to tell my story and advocate for those who suffer Mental Illness in the State of New York.