



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins Sponsors Educational Mental Health Forum for Youth Advisory Council

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS June 6, 2024

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New York State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins sponsored a mental health forum for her Youth Advisory Council (YAC), bringing mental health experts to offer ways kids can help friends who are struggling.

The forum, held at Sen. Stewart-Cousins' district office in Yonkers on Friday, May 31, featured presentations from "the harris project" director Stephanie Marquesano, National Alliance on

Mental Illness (NAMI) representative Georgie D'Avanzo, and Westchester-based Student Assistance Services Corporation representative Monique Tricarico. The trio of experts spoke about a variety of mental health issues facing young people, and informed YAC members about a number of resources available to students and members of the public.

"As a mother, grandmother and former teacher, I understand the pressures that students endure may have amplified feelings of isolation and stress," **Sen. Stewart-Cousins said**. "These young people are working on bettering our community, and that includes mental health. I'm impressed by their interest in learning more about this issue."

"It's always an honor to be included in Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins' Youth Advisory Council mental health and wellness meeting. This meeting provides a great opportunity to reconnect, share key resources, and highlight the critical role government plays in advancing this work," **the harris project director Stephanie Marquesano said**. "Many of the student participants are already engaged in our Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness programming thanks to a commitment by the Leader and her team to educate and empower youth about the relationship between mental health challenges and substance use issues."

"I was impressed by these youth leaders and their interest in mental health and educating themselves on community resources," **NAMI Westchester Administrative Assistant and student ambassador Georgie D'Avanzo said**. "These students are dedicated to creating a space for open conversations and ending the stigma surrounding many mental health issues."

"It is crucial for students to remember that if they are concerned about a peer, they should speak with a trusted adult and encourage their peer to seek help from a qualified professional, whether at school or within the community," **said Monique Tricarico of Student Assistance Services**.

NYS Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins' Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is composed of high school students from her Senate District, which includes a significant portion of Yonkers, the Town of Greenburgh, and the Town of Mount Pleasant. YAC Members have the opportunity to advise the Senator on issues that impact young people, and participate in community events, workshops, and advocacy projects.

"I believe I speak for all members of the Youth Advisory Council when I say that this meeting was incredibly informative," said **Jillian Maher, YAC Member and 12th grader at Yonkers High School**. "It offered me and my peers valuable insights into the complexities of mental health and equipped us with ways to support those who are struggling. This experience also helped us understand how, through open conversations, we can actively reduce the stigma surrounding mental health."

Sen. Stewart-Cousins has delivered millions in funding for mental health services and education in the state budget. In the 2024-25 budget adopted earlier this year, the State allocated \$55 million for 200 new inpatient beds and \$33 million to enhance services for first responders and those in the criminal justice system, while \$75 million will enhance Crisis Services, addressing serious mental illnesses and supporting youth. Sen. Stewart-Cousins has also delivered state funding to Westchester, with nearly \$1 million allocated to support health care and mental health initiatives.