



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Senator Stewart-Cousins Speaks on Co-Occurring Disorder Awareness Day

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New Rochelle, NY - Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins joined members of the Harris Project, a group committed to raising awareness about co-occurring disorders, and students at New Rochelle High School as part of Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness Day. Co-occurring disorders are described as the presence of both a mental health and a substance-use disorder. "Combating co-occurring disorders and helping break the cycle of substance abuse is an issue we all need to address," said Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins. "I am incredibly proud of the students at New Rochelle High School for the commitment they've shown by standing up for their peers and helping them seek treatment. I especially want to commend the Stephanie Marquesano for creating the Harris Project and taking a leadership role in the fight against co-occurring disorders and I will work with them, and my colleagues on the local, County, and State level to address co-occurring disorders and substance misuse." The Co-Occurring Disorders Awareness (CODA) Day event was led by Stephanie Marquesano, the founder of the Harris Project, and student members of the CODA Club at New Rochelle High School. In addition to Senator Stewart-Cousins, other speakers included Assemblywoman Shelley Mayer, Commissioner Michael Orth of the Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health, Deputy County Executive Ken Jenkins, and County Legislator Damon Maher. The Harris Project is a Westchester-based nonprofit organization that aims to help young adults suffering from such conditions seek and receive treatment. The leaders who organize Co-Occurring Disorder Awareness (CODA) Day are students who work yearlong to bring attention to and reduce the stigma around this condition. "My son Harris had co-occurring disorders and died by accidental overdose when he was 19," said Stephanie Marquesano. "He turned to substances to self-medicate an anxiety

disorder and ADHD. When I envisioned CODA, I thought about what would Harris have needed to know about the relationship between his mental health and substance misuse/addiction for things to have been different for him, and how could we create messaging that would resonate. I think what makes the Harris Project and our CODA prevention program so different is that it is solution driven, full of hope, and encourages our youth to have a significant voice in changing outcomes for themselves and their peers. A high school led prevention movement is an incredible window of opportunity." Substance misuse co-occurring disorders impact 60 to 75 percent of adolescent Americans with mental illnesses. Teenagers who experience major depressive episodes are twice as likely to misuse substances as their peers are. Senator Stewart-Cousins highlighted the importance of open communication in her remarks and stressed the important role peer support can play in treatment and recovery. Thanks to Senator Stewart-Cousins' advocacy and leadership, the recently passed State Budget included resources to help victims of substance misuse seek help and receive treatment, including \$247 million to combat the opioid epidemic. Additionally, \$10.6 million were allocated to fund support services like the Adolescent Clubhouse program, through which young adults receive support from their peers. These funding successes further the work of the State's Task Force on Co-Occurring Disorders which was organized in June 2007 to analyze and address obstacles to integrated services for victims of mental health disorders and substance misuse.