



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

# **Senator Helming Bill Opens Opportunities for Children's Mental Health Services in Schools**

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**News from Senator Helming**

Senator Pam Helming has introduced a bill (S.6080) making it easier for school districts to offer student mental health services via telehealth, giving families greater access to needed services for their children.

Under current state law, mental health services are only allowed in schools with a provider on site.

The legislation proposes that five percent of the state tax imposed on mobile sports wagering be dedicated annually to a new 'student mental telehealth reimbursement fund' for school districts.

This legislation follows ongoing conversations Senator Helming has had with parents struggling to get timely appointments for their children, as well as community roundtable discussions. Most recently, Senator Helming led a Children's Mental Health Roundtable in December which brought together school superintendents and counselors, mental health professionals, and leaders from the region's hospital systems.

"In the last couple of years especially, I have heard from many concerned parents who are put on months-long waiting lists to get their children mental health services. I've spoken with our schools and mental and behavioral health leaders. All are asking for legislative action. This bill opens the door to get students access to the services they need while addressing the significant challenge faced by our rural schools and communities in particular," said Senator Helming.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, student mental health and well-being remain a significant concern for school districts in the state.

Palmyra-Macedon School Superintendent Dr. Robert Ike added, "I join Senator Helming in stressing just how important it is to protect the mental health of our students. We know and understand the damaging effects of the pandemic, including its impact on our students. Students likely carried more than just their bags with them to school every day. Schools are safe places, and we want to make sure our students can feel confident they're walking into an environment dedicated to providing the mental health resources they need. Expanding telehealth resources will strengthen the support network available to students by breaking down possible barriers. We are so grateful for Senator Helming's support and her commitment to our students and their well-being."

Manchester-Shortsville Superintendent Charlene Dehn said, "Expanding access for students and families to receive mental health services is our primary goal and it is especially important for rural communities."

In October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association declared a state of emergency in children's mental health. Further, the United States Surgeon General issued a detailed advisory on the urgent need to address the nation's youth mental health crisis.

The CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 4 in 10 students felt persistently sad or hopeless, approximately 29 percent of students had experienced or were experiencing poor mental health, with more than 1 in 5 students seriously considering suicide.

Senator Helming added, "We need to do more to protect our greatest asset, our kids. Local school administrators report children in our youngest grades are exhibiting behaviors in school that have never been seen before. This bill is a key step to getting our children the help they need. I thank all the parents and school and healthcare leaders who are working with me to develop solutions."