



**Memorandum of Support
S.6234 (Hamilton)**

Relates to Mental Health First Aid Training for Teachers

Community Access expands opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy and healing-focused services. We are built upon the simple truth that people are experts in their own lives. Community Access provides a range of housing, job skills, employment placement and professional support services to help break the cycle of homelessness, institutionalization and/or incarceration that often complicates the lives of people who have a history of mental illness.

Mental Health First Aid is an in-person training proven to be effective in mitigating mental health crisis and identifying need for help. Not only does it give trainees the resources needed to assist in a situation in which someone is experiencing a mental health problem, but it decreases the isolation and stigma created by negative attitudes and perceptions toward people with mental illness.

Anyone can become certified in Mental Health First Aid through an eight hour course. It is relevant for all community members, but particularly those in public service. The benefit that public school teachers would receive from this training would be significant. Not only would it offer them opportunities to identify, de-escalate, and provide connections in times of need but the course has also been proven to improve the mental health and well-being of the people receiving it.

Teachers are placed in stressful situations daily with students. Having the appropriate resources to be able to deal with some of the stresses they encounter is a responsibility for leadership in NY. School-age children present mental health issues in ways that are not always clear to teachers and may appear to be behavioral disorders. Acting out trauma through violent speech and behavior for example, or being withdrawn, can be some first signs that a child is struggling with their mental health. Mental Health First Aid provides the tools a teacher needs to quickly identify a need and be able to make connections or provide support for children.

At times, the primary support a school-age child has is in the classroom. At Community Access, we know how mental health challenges can dismantle a person's education from a young age. The challenges can strike people early, particularly when children and families are faced with poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, or a family history of mental illness. Offering our children the resources that will enable them to remain safe and focused in schools is imperative to their continued success as young adults and adults in achieving academic and employment attainments as well as social well-being.

Community Access supports Senator Jesse Hamilton's bold initiative to mandate Mental Health First Aid training for teachers in NY. Offering this tool as a component of continuing education will benefit teachers, school-age children and their families, and will provide a solid foundation for well-being that has the potential to impact all New Yorkers into the future.