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PRESS RELEASE

**NYS Senator Jesse Hamilton and NYS Assemblyman Marcos A. Crespo
Launch Mental Health First Aid Bill
Bringing Together Legislators, Educators, Mental Health Advocates,
and Health Care Professionals in Support**

Mental Health First Aid Bill to bolster healthy childhoods for all New York youth.

Albany, NY – NYS Senator Jesse Hamilton and Assemblyman Marcos Crespo launched legislation that provides a critical link between New York youth and better mental health at a press conference in Albany today. Senator Hamilton serves as Ranking Member of the New York State Senate Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. He was joined by colleagues, educators, mental health advocates, and health care professionals, who spoke about the importance of mental health education and in support of Senator Jesse Hamilton and Assemblyman Marcos A. Crespo’s Mental Health First Aid Bill (S6234A) that creates a continuing education requirement for teachers relating to mental health issues.

NYS Senator Jesse Hamilton said, “Mental health impacts children's readiness to learn just as surely as having the right textbooks, up-to-date technology, or school meals. That's why this legislation aims at sharpening the expertise of educators across New York State. This Mental Health First Aid Bill will contribute to our schools' ability to promote wellness. Educators will be better able to assess risks and make that critical first link towards help. This measure will help strengthen the infrastructure of mental health care in our communities and I am proud to be joined by so many colleagues, and advocates concerned about education, mental health, and promoting the well-being of youth in our state.”

“It has become an imperative that New York moves quickly to help our youth cope with the increasing stresses they face in daily life. Training school staff to better identify and find resources for youth facing mental health issues is an initiative which is overdue. With over 200,000 New York children and teens having a mental health diagnosis and with another 20% of youth suffering with mental disorders that impair their daily lives, schools need to understand that the implementation of mental health first aid is a benefit for the student and for the classroom. In many cases, mental health first aid can be the difference between life and death as teen suicides and suicide attempts are on the rise,” stated **Assemblyman Marcos A. Crespo**, chair of the Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force. He added, “The work of Senator Jesse Hamilton on highlighting the need for mental health first aid in our schools is leadership with life-changing and life-saving impact.

Executive Director of the NYS Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health Andrea Smyth said, “Senator Hamilton brings our attention to a well-known problem in almost every school in New York: the lack of staff development in the area of trauma-informed classroom management techniques. Children's mental health providers are often asked by school districts to bring school-

based mental health services and supports to the youth, but this initiative supports continuing education and in-service training for school personnel. This approach to behavior management will have long-lasting impact on student achievement and school performance. Senator Hamilton's approach is similar to what is proposed in the new federal education act, which is to arm staff and personnel with appropriate skills and practices to prevent crisis and conflict and give them the confidence to know when to refer a youth for additional mental health services. The Coalition strongly supports this approach.”

Wendy Burch, Executive Director of the National Alliance for Mental Illness-New York State (NAMI-NYS) New York State, said, "Education, early recognition and intervention as well as working on prevention are keys to minimizing mental health issues that are common in adolescents and hopefully, eradicating the long-term disabilities caused by mental illness. It is vital that New York's education system does a better job of creating a true comprehension of mental illness and mental health issues. This begins with providing school staff with the tools to recognize mental health issues and communicate those concerns with parents. NAMI-NYS applauds Senator Hamilton's commitment to proactively addressing this vital issue with the introduction of S6234."

The Director of the Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project Mary Beth Anderson said, “The Mental Health Project of the Urban Justice Center supports all efforts to help educate people about mental health conditions and ways to engage in recovery. Our project director and director of social work are certified in the mental health first aid public safety model, and we have been privileged to train not only our own staff, but incoming classes of NYC Department of Correction officers. We believe mental health needs to be treated as any other health condition, and it should not be surrounded by stigma and prejudice. People with mental illness are often reluctant to obtain care, for fear that they will face discrimination due to their mental health conditions. Educating people in how to provide first aid to people in mental health crisis is essential and important.”

The bill's Justification Memo highlights the points that, given our youth spend more time in school than they do anywhere else except their own home, school is one of the best places for both educators and students to become aware of mental health issues, mental health problems and mental disorders. Schools serve as one of the most efficient places to promote mental health well-being, and in developing and delivering interventions that can improve youth mental health effectively and efficiently. The bill's Justification Memo continues, the Mental Health First Aid curriculum is unique in that it is aimed at nonprofessional audiences and specifically seeks to aid in reducing social distance, increase help-seeking and helping behaviors, and provide strategies to assist an individual in crisis.

Why a “first aider” approach is vital to the community:

- Mental health problems are common.
- People with mental health problems often face negative attitudes and discrimination.
- Many people are not well informed about mental health issues.
- Professional help is not always readily available.
- People often do not know how to respond or react.
- People with mental health problems often do not seek help.

A continuing education curriculum will assist in educators responding to their students by:

- Assessing for risk of suicide or harm
- Learning to listen with a non-judgmental attitude
- Sharing reassurance and information with knowledge and confidence
- The correct way to encourage appropriate professional help
- Persuade self-help and other support strategies

WHO: Senator Jesse Hamilton
Assembly Member Marcos A. Crespo
Assembly Member Nick Perry
Joined by:

- Senator David Carlucci
- Senator Leroy Comrie
- Senator Roxanne Persaud
- Assembly Member Charles Barron
- Assembly Member Diana Richardson
- Assembly Member Didi Barrett
- Assembly Member Félix W. Ortiz
- Assembly Member Latrice Walker
- Assembly Member Luis Sepúlveda
- Assembly Member Robert Rodriguez
- Assembly Member Ron Kim
- Assembly Member Steve Katz

Representatives from:

- Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State
- Community Access
- Families On The Move of New York City, Inc.
- Harm Reduction Coalition
- Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS)
- Interagency Council of Developmental Disabilities Agencies (IAC)
- Self Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS)
- New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services
- National Alliance on Mental Illness - NYS / (NAMI NYS)
- National Council for Behavioral Health
- New York State Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health
- SUNY Downstate
- Upstate New York Autism Alliance (UNYAA)
- Urban Justice Center (UJC)

WHAT: Mental Health First Aid Bill Press Conference

WHEN: Thursday, January 21, 2016, 10:00 am

WHERE: LCA Room 130 in the Legislative Office Building, Albany, NY

About Senator Hamilton:

Senator Jesse Hamilton has spent his entire career helping people, including over 15 years as President of the School Board and District Leader. He is a husband, father, and public servant delivering and fighting for one of the most diverse Senate districts in New York State.

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