

Ulster County Legislature



Robert S. Parete

Legislator, District No. 19
Laws and Rules, Governmental Services, Deputy Chairman
Health & Personnel Committee

P.O. Box 1800
Kingston, New York 12401
(845) 340-3900

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 20, 2013

CONTACT: Robert Parete 340-3900

Ulster County School-based Mental Health and School Safety Act of 2013 Takes Effect Today

Ulster County Legislator Robert S. Parete (D-Stone Ridge) is anxiously waiting for the Commissioner of the Ulster County Mental Health Department to conduct a needs assessment of mental health services in school districts and issue a report to the Members of the Ulster County Legislature before the final 2014 budget is adopted by the Ulster County Legislature. The County Legislature is required by Law to adopt an annual operating budget in December. The Ulster County School-based Mental Health and School Safety Act of 2013 takes effect today, Wednesday, November 20, 2013, which requires a needs assessment of mental health programs in Ulster County school districts.

The Ulster County School-based Mental Health and School Safety Act of 2013, which was authored by Legislator Robert Parete and adopted by the Ulster County Legislature on July 24, 2013 with overwhelming bipartisan support. This Law will provide a strong basis for children and families suffering from mental health issues in Ulster County. The debate is over; Ulster County must provide assistance to Ulster County School Districts based upon on the findings of the needs assessment. Families are in desperate need of services for their children ranging from, but not limited to, student counseling, anti-bullying programs, eating disorders awareness and prevention programs, reducing school dropout rates, alternatives to violence and gangs, and suicide prevention to name just a few.

Legislator Robert Parete states "as I have stressed to my colleagues in the past, the lack of adequate mental health services significantly affects school attendance and limits academic success for students suffering from mental health issues. The stigmatization of people dealing with mental health issues combined with the economic pressures on schools has reduced access to mental health services in Ulster County. Recent funding and personnel cuts to Ulster County based mental health programs have only exacerbated this gap in services."

School Superintendents and Administrators throughout Ulster County have one thing in common: school districts are in desperate need of financial assistance to pay for these services. In fact, schools are looking forward to working with the County Legislature to provide the necessary mental health services to their students and families. Schools have two revenue sources; property taxes and state aid, and are required to operate in line with the two percent tax cap. Furthermore, schools do not have the luxury of drawing from the same plethora of

revenue sources as County Government (Motor Vehicle Fee's, Sales Tax, Property Tax, Hotel Tax, Mortgage Tax, as well as a variety of other fees to name a few.)

This local law shall be implemented and administered in the following manner:

SECTION 4. ADMINISTRATION.

The Commissioner of the Ulster County Mental Health Department, in consultation with the Community Services Board, shall be authorized and directed to perform the following actions:

1. Conduct a needs assessment every three years of mental health services in Ulster County School Districts and report its findings to the Legislature.
2. Provide assistance to Ulster County School Districts and BOCES based upon the findings of the needs assessment.
3. Procure Intermunicipal shared services agreements on behalf of the County.
4. Report the Program's efficacy to the County Legislature on an annual basis.
5. The Commissioner of Mental Health Department, in consultation with the Legislature's committee assigned to oversee health matters, is hereby authorized to develop procedures necessary to implement this section.

In furtherance of this local law, School Districts should offer students counseling, conflict mediation and resiliency building, alternatives to violence and gangs, attendance monitoring, community referral and liaison work, school dropout reduction, suicide prevention, crisis intervention, child and family advocacy, peer mediation and intervention programs, anti-bullying, and eating disorders awareness and prevention programs.

Schools may consult with the Ulster County Sheriff to safely provide security, including the possibility of placement of School Resource Officers, for those in educational settings.

A copy of this Law can be found at:

http://www.ulstercountyny.gov/legislature/local_laws/Local%20Law%20No.%202%20of%202013.pdf

Here is a statement from Ulster County Legislator Robert Parete after the passage of this Law.

http://co.ulster.ny.us/legislature/legislative_press/LL%20No%201%20of%202013%20Statement.pdf

###