

## Ulster County Considers Children’s Mental Health Clinics in Kingston, Ellenville



*The Ulster County Center for Well-Being at 368 Broadway in Kingston, N.Y. Photo taken Friday, April 4, 2024 (Tania Barricklo/Daily Freeman)*

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KINGSTON, N.Y. — Ulster County is considering opening children’s mental health clinics on Broadway and in the village of Ellenville with the ability to serve approximately 1,200 children annually. The clinics could open as soon as later this year.

“We’re responding to what has been unprecedented anxiety and emotional distress amongst young people through the country and our county today,” Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger told the Freeman on Thursday, April 4. “They really need additional support and mental health support to really thrive.

Metzger said there is a shortage of such services in Ulster County, adding that the county’s Department of Mental Health recommended the county fill these gaps by providing expanded services.

Metzger said the two locations would be at the new Ulster County Center for Well-Being at 368 Broadway and the Trudy Resnick Farber Building at 50 Center St. in Ellenville.

“We’re constructing a crisis stabilization center for both youth and adults,” Metzger said. “It’s a one-stop for people in crisis, people need support and services for youth.”

Children’s and adult services would be completely separated, she added.

Metzger’s office said the new children’s clinic would initially be funded with \$700,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funding. Metzger added that the program would later be sustained through health insurance payments from Medicaid and private insurers.

The County Legislature is set to [vote](#) at its Tuesday, April 16, meeting on using the ARPA funding for the Center. This would clear the way for a Request for Proposals for non-profit vendors who would operate the center and employ the providers, she said.

The RFP process will take a few months, according to Metzger. Still, she expressed confidence the locations could open this year.

Planned services include diagnostic assessments, individual and family therapy, medication management and crisis intervention, Metzger said. The program could minimally serve 100 children a month or about 1,200 children annually, she added.

She said anxiety and depression are both very common amongst young people.

“When you’re dealing with these kinds of stressors as a young person it’s hard to focus on school,” she said. Over the years teachers have told officials these are the number one challenge they’re seeing in the classroom, she added.

This can hold youngsters back unless they get the support they need, she said.

The program will build on the county’s Mental Health in Schools Program, which provides clinical support to middle school students in every school district in the county, Metzger said that program is also funded by ARPA funding.

“We’ve gotten positive feedback from educators, school administrators as well as those served,” she said.

But she acknowledged the need is so much greater and that is what prompted the county to consider the two new clinics.

As for what hours the centers might operate, Metzger said there will need to be flexible hours to ensure children and families can access the service. “It’s very important to have flexibility, especially for young people,” she added.

Services at the two centers will be available year-round, not just when school is in session, she said.

As for what’s causing the uptick in the need for mental health services for children and youth, Metzger admitted COVID-19 has been a major contributing factor, The lockdowns and restrictions disrupted daily routines and youngsters experienced prolonged periods of social isolation along with fears of illness, she said. She suspects other factors like social media also contribute to the stress children are experiencing.

“We’re very excited to be able to offer these additional services to our youth,” Metzger said. “This is a real priority of my administration for the county to address what we see as the mental health needs of youth and families.”