

Dear Senator Oroho, Asm. Space, and Asm. Wirths,

We recently learned that School Based Youth Services Programs across the state will have their funding completely eliminated if Governor Murphy's budget is passed by the state legislature. For Sussex County, this will mean the end of the highly effective student support and counseling services provided by "The Student Center" at Sussex County Technical School. This program has been helping students at Sussex Tech since 1988. Many of the students served have serious emotional, behavioral and mental health challenges and require individualized monitoring and school-based therapy. This is a lifeline which is especially critical now due to the increase in anxiety, depression and other mental health issues among youth. Parents often make the decision to send their child to Sussex Tech based on the outstanding reputation of the counseling and support services provided by its Student Center.

Each year 90-110 students at Sussex Tech have received ongoing professional individual counseling and another 60+ students per year have been provided with group therapy. Groups include Anger Management, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy for at-risk, self-harming students, LGBTQ+ support, and a group for students with socialization issues which includes students on the autism spectrum. The Student Center even has a contract with a local psychiatric nurse practitioner who provides on-site psychiatric evaluations and medication monitoring. In addition, the Student Center sponsors Sussex Tech's peer mentoring program, numerous recreation activities, and events that introduce all students at the high school to a wide range of community services.

Student Center staff collaborate with local substance use prevention and treatment programs to coordinate the best care for students needing addictions support. They collaborate with the local hospice to support grieving teens and their families. They have a strong relationship with local sexual trauma and domestic violence and prevention programs to provide coordinated care for traumatized youth and to educate students about relationships, dating, and dating violence prevention. They provide crisis management and onsite suicide assessments. They have a strong relationship with local hospital psychiatric services and work to provide seamless transitions for students who need to utilize those services.

State funding for all 90 School Based Youth Services Programs comes to under \$14 million a year. Please find a way to preserve that relatively small amount of funding in order to give many of our most vulnerable teens the support they need to thrive and succeed in school and in their future careers.

Respectfully yours,

Robert D. Cubby, Chair

The Advocacy Committee of NAMI Sussex

(Affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness)