

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Announces New Initiatives to Support Youth Mental Health

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Administration Unveils Efforts for Statewide Trainings in Mental Health and Working Group to Help Schools Address Youth Mental Health Needs

MAPLE SHADE – Recognizing the widespread and increasing mental health needs of our young people, Governor Phil Murphy today announced new initiatives through our schools and institutions of higher education to support youth mental health. The Department of Human Services will work in partnership with the National Council of Behavioral Health to conduct statewide Mental Health First Aid trainings for school personnel from K-12 and higher education institutions, and the Department of Education will lead a statewide youth mental health working group that will develop resources, including best practices for school and mental health provider connections to support student needs.

The Administration’s new initiatives are a comprehensive response to a challenging reality: one in five Americans have a mental illness and many are reluctant to reach out for help or do not know where to get help. Suicide was the second-leading cause of death among 15 to 24-year-olds, and more than one in four students report feeling persistently sad or hopeless.

“Our mental health is just as important as our physical health, but as a society we are often unfamiliar with the signs and symptoms of mental illness,” **said Governor Murphy**. “With improved training for school and higher education personnel and better opportunities for school and provider connections, we can better address and support the mental health needs of our young people. We are committed to ensuring that our residents have access to the resources they need to thrive and succeed in life.”

The statewide Mental Health First Aid Training, in partnership with the National Council of Behavioral Health, will provide every New Jersey public school district, charter or renaissance school, approved private school for students with disabilities (APSSD), and higher education institution the opportunity to send at least one staff person to an intensive training to become a certified Mental Health First Aid instructor. The New Jersey Department of Human Services will host statewide training sessions for school and higher education personnel to become certified through Mental Health First Aid’s “train the trainer” model. Participants will learn the risk factors and warning signs of youth mental health issues and be able to connect students to the appropriate resources and supports from community behavioral health providers. \$6 million in funding for the trainings is supported by \$100 million in opioid funding through Fiscal Year 2020 budget.

The New Jersey Department of Education will launch the statewide Mental Health Working Group. The group, which includes school practitioners, mental health providers, state agencies, and advocates, will develop resources for districts to support the mental health needs of their students that will lead to healthy and successful lives. In addition to providing best practice resources, the working group will boost resource sharing and communication between school communities, mental health providers, state agencies, and stakeholder groups.

 Back
to top

"As multiple data sources clearly show, our youth are struggling," said **Former U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy, founder of The Kennedy Forum and co-chair of Mental Health for US**. "By prioritizing mental health trainings and initiatives in schools and institutions of higher education, Governor Murphy is tackling this issue head on and showing the nation that in New Jersey, mental health is essential health. These efforts will save lives."

"Mental health affects our daily life, relationships and physical health, and there is a great deal government can do to help students learn and have the support they need – both inside and outside the classroom," said **First Lady of New York City Chirlane McCray**. "In New York City, our work to end stigma, help young people build resilience, and connect those in need to care has reached hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. We thank Governor Murphy for his leadership and look forward to working together to achieve a high standard of health and wellbeing for everyone in our cities."

"We're investing in Mental Health First Aid because everyone should know how to help a friend, colleague or student facing a mental health challenge – just like we all know how to help when someone needs first aid for a physical ailment," **Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson** said. "When young people need help and support, we want to make sure that the educators they trust have the tools to respond. The Murphy Administration is committed to the health and wellness of all New Jerseyans and today we are taking another step forward in supporting those goals."

"The mental health of the students in our schools can sometimes be an overlooked and neglected component of a child's growth," said **Education Commissioner Lamont O. Repollet**. "Our plan is to create a roadmap that school districts and parents can use to provide children with the behavioral and mental health supports they need."

"Students need to feel safe, supported, and included in their learning environments- this is a critical element for fostering student success," said **Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis**. "Our postsecondary institutions have a responsibility to ensure the safety of all students, including providing access to social and professional supports like mental health services. As a State, we want to help support institutions- and our students- in this commitment and the investment the Governor is announcing today will allow us to do just that."

"DCF welcomes a full-government approach to helping NJ families thrive and supporting youth who are dealing with stress, anxiety, depression and other mental and behavioral health challenges," said **DCF Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer**. "In partnership, we can provide a full continuum of service to youth, meeting them where they are, both physically and developmentally. Children as young as infants and toddlers through late adolescence; at home, at school, or in the community. Collectively, we can provide the assistance and support kids need to heal and that families need to stay safe, healthy and connected."

"I want to thank Governor Murphy for addressing such an important issue," said **Assembly Majority Leader Louis Greenwald**. "It is critical that we implement a state wide mental health training program to train employees in public and private schools and higher education. I have called mental illness a 'silent killer' because too often, we do not spot the signs and symptoms until it is too late. I am confident that if we work together, we can make an impact and solidify New Jersey as a leader on the issue of children's mental health."

"It is imperative that we develop policies that help schools and parents be able to recognize the signs of mental illness and make it possible for them to assist young people in getting the necessary help," said **Assemblyman Herb Conaway**. "We must work together to address the issue of mental health, especially when it comes to children. I applaud Governor Murphy for taking the lead in this important effort."

"Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, and 75 percent by age 24. For kids to stay on track they need prevention, early intervention, integrated care and treatment – all leading to recovery. Education professionals are well-positioned to recognize warning signs, step in before stage 4 and avert crises. Mental Health First Aid is a vehicle to help school personnel in this process," said **Carolyn**

Beauchamp, President and CEO of the Mental Health Association in New Jersey.

"It is critical to provide emotional support to youth as they navigate their way to adulthood," **said Meredith Masin Blount, Executive Director of NAMI NJ.** "The internal and external pressures on children are increasing, and programs like these are key to identifying warning signs to keep them safe. NAMI NJ is grateful to the Governor for taking these steps for the children of New Jersey; as we move toward a society that is free from stigma and supportive of those affected by mental illness."

"The New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc. (NJAMHAA) applauds Governor Murphy and his Administration for investing in Mental Health First Aid, an international program proven to be effective," **said Debra L. Wentz, President and Chief Executive Officer of NJAMHAA.** "This train-the-trainer model will give the kindergarten through 12 school community and institutions of higher education the powerful tools they need to raise awareness about what mental health is and how to recognize when someone is struggling with mental health and substance use disorders. By learning about these illnesses and that they are treatable, school officials and those they in turn train in this model will more openly talk about mental health and substance use disorders, breaking down the barrier of stigma that has prevented children and youth from revealing their thoughts and feelings and getting help early. Exponentially, Mental Health First Aid will create a safe space to deal with these illnesses that are no different than other illnesses that children and youth experience."

Measure Brings the Project a Step Closer to Full Funding Grant Agreement for Replacement of 109-Year-Old Bridge

NEWARK — NJ TRANSIT is commending the U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) decision to give an improved project rating to a proposed replacement of the Portal Bridge. The 109-year-old swing span over the Hackensack River, and its history of mechanical breakdowns, has long been a chokepoint for rail customers travelling the Northeast Corridor (NEC) between New Jersey and New York City.

"From day one, my administration has worked closely with our congressional delegation and Secretary Chao's team to enhance this critical project that cannot wait another day — we have committed the entirety of New Jersey's local share in the form of \$600 million in EDA bonds, completed critical early construction work and developed shovel-ready plans for major construction. Today's decision by USDOT puts us one step closer toward our ultimate goal; replacing this unreliable, century-old bridge and reducing delays for NJ TRANSIT customers," **said New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy.** "New Jersey remains ready and willing to work cooperatively as a full partner to ensure that this project, which affects the commutes of tens of thousands of our residents daily, is completed as expeditiously as possible."

"We are very thankful that the FTA has improved its rating of the critical Portal North Bridge project," **said Amtrak Board Chair Tony Coscia.** "A new bridge will significantly increase reliability for the 200,000 daily Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT customers that cross the Hackensack River each day. We thank our partners at NJ TRANSIT for their leadership, FTA and DOT for their cooperation, and all of our federal and state champions in New Jersey, New York and across the country for their continued support as we look forward to progressing this critical element of the Gateway Program."

"Any rail customer that commutes between New Jersey and New York City will attest to the importance of the reliability this bridge has on the quality of their daily lives," **said New Jersey Department of Transportation Commissioner and NJ TRANSIT Chair Diane Gutierrez- Scaccetti.** "This antiquated bridge remains a single point of failure on the NEC, which makes its replacement a top priority. We're grateful that the USDOT recognizes how critical this link is to the economic viability of this region and look forward to getting construction underway as soon as possible."

"We are extremely pleased with the USDOT's decision to advance the Portal North Project closer to a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA). This critical project can't wait any longer as this nearly 110-year-old bridge is a frequent source for delays and frustration for our nearly 90,000 customers who travel to and from Penn Station New York every day," **said NJ TRANSIT President & CEO Kevin Corbett.** "We thank the USDOT, and our partners at the FTA and FRA, for their support of this shovel-ready project that will increase capacity and ensure reliability for the more than 450 NJ TRANSIT and Amtrak trains a day that cross the Portal Bridge."

In September 2019, NJ TRANSIT, as the Project Sponsor in partnership with Amtrak, submitted a revised financial plan to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The revised plan was adjusted to reflect FTA and USDOT feedback on a previous submissions, making more local money available for the project while keeping costs in check. NJ TRANSIT and the state of New Jersey doubled the share of local funding toward the project, increasing the state's contribution from \$300 million to \$600 million dollars.

Advancing the Portal North Bridge Project towards construction is critical to eliminating the major disruptions to train service on the NEC between Newark, New Jersey and New York Penn Station. The NEC is the busiest passenger rail line in the United States, and a long-term outage of the Portal Bridge over the Hackensack River would result in catastrophic delays from Boston to the nation's capital.

Between NJ TRANSIT and Amtrak, more than 450 trains a day cross the current Portal Bridge carrying passengers making almost 200,000 daily trips. NJ TRANSIT alone carries approximately 90,000 customers (180,000 passenger trips) between New Jersey and New York City on an average weekday. The bridge regularly opens to allow for marine traffic to pass, and each opening causes delays on both lines. When the 109-year-old bridge fails to properly close, the delays cascade to affect tens of thousands of customers and their families.

The replacement Portal North Bridge is designed as a high-level, fixed span bridge that will allow marine traffic to pass underneath without interrupting rail traffic. The project is one hundred percent designed, fully permitted, and has seen early work completed on time and under budget. These successes make it especially well-positioned to begin construction to provide increased reliability and capacity to rail passengers throughout the region and nation in the near-term.

Once full construction begins, the remainder of the Portal North Bridge Project is estimated to take approximately five years.

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[Internship Opportunities \(/governor/admin/internship.shtml\)](#)

[Governor's Residence - Drumthwacket \(<http://drumthwacket.org/>\)](#)

Key Initiatives

[Economy & Jobs \(/governor/initiatives/#Economy\)](#)

[Education \(/governor/initiatives/#Education\)](#)

[Environment \(/governor/initiatives/#Environment\)](/governor/initiatives/#Environment)

[Health \(/governor/initiatives/#Health\)](/governor/initiatives/#Health)

[Law & Justice \(/governor/initiatives/#Justice\)](/governor/initiatives/#Justice)

[Transportation \(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation\)](/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

News & Events

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[Public Addresses \(/governor/news/addresses\)](/governor/news/addresses)

[Executive Orders \(/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html\)](/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html)

[Administrative Orders \(/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)

[Direct Appointments \(/governor/news/appointments\)](/governor/news/appointments)

[Advice and Consent Appointments \(/governor/news/acappointments\)](/governor/news/acappointments)

[Statements on Legislation](#)

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[Administration Reports \(/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml)

[Transition Reports \(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

[Press Kits \(/governor/news/press\)](/governor/news/press)

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