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MARLTON – During a visit to Cherokee High School in Marlton, New Jersey, Governor Mikie Sherrill highlighted ongoing progress on her kids' online safety agenda. The Governor was joined by Assemblywoman Andrea Katz, a strong legislative proponent of youth mental health and well-being; Jacqueline Gibbs, President of the New Jersey Parent Teacher Association; and representatives from the Lenape Regional High School District.

Families across the country are grappling with a youth mental health crisis, including surging rates of depression and anxiety among children and adolescents. This public health crisis has been compounded by unrestricted social media use and predatory, addictive algorithms pushed by Big Tech.

Governor Sherrill has made it a top priority to better understand this persistent crisis and has taken action to ensure the State has the tools necessary to improve youth mental health outcomes and protect children online.

"Across the nation, we are facing a stark reality – our kids are struggling with an unprecedented mental health crisis, and social media is playing a big part. As a mom of four, I can tell you with certainty that our country is failing our children when it comes to protecting them online," **said Governor Sherrill**. "We have a responsibility to do better. My Administration is committed to counteracting the harms of social media and supporting youth mental health, and I am proud to put forward a plan that reflects these values."

On Day One, the Governor signed Executive Order No. 6, creating the Office of Youth Online Mental Health Safety within the Department of Health to coordinate whole-of-government efforts to keep kids safe online and directing all state agencies with jurisdiction over issues pertaining to children and their interaction with technology platforms to prioritize children's mental health outcomes.

The Governor's Fiscal Year 2027 proposed spending plan includes a \$125,000 investment to support the new Office of Youth Online Mental Health Safety and Awareness in the Department of Health. It also includes a \$500,000 investment that will fund the State's first-ever Social Media Research Center, which will be housed within one of New Jersey's public institutions of higher education and will focus on the relationship between digital technology and children's mental health and well-being.

"As a mom of three teenagers, I have a front-row seat to just how central social media is to young people's lives. It plays a role in all of our lives, and it's not going anywhere, but we also know the consequences of spending too much time online. Families are feeling those impacts every day: increased anxiety, depression, and eating disorders; disrupted sleep; and harmful content reaching kids far too easily," **said Assemblywoman Andrea Katz**. "Now is the time to prioritize the mental health of New Jersey's youth. Now is the time to make online spaces safer for minors in an ever-changing digital landscape. Now is the time to warn users about real mental health risks and equip families and educators with the knowledge they need to keep minors safe online. I look forward to working with Governor Sherrill's administration to champion our kids and put their mental health first."

"As President of the New Jersey PTA, I applaud Governor Sherrill for making student mental health and children's online safety a priority from day one. This action sends a strong message that the well-being of our children and families matter, and NJPTA stands ready to support these efforts," **said Jacqueline Gibbs, President of the New Jersey Parent Teacher Association (NJPTA)**. "We look forward to working alongside the Governor, the Legislature, and the Department of Health to make New Jersey a model for keeping every child safe – online and in school."

"The core of our mission, ensuring safety and advancing student achievement, cannot be fully realized unless students feel safe. That is why mental health has been a sustained priority for us over several years. We are proud to offer a range of comprehensive programs and supports designed to promote and protect the mental well-being of our students," **said Matt Webb, Lenape Regional High School District Superintendent**. "As educators, we believe in lifelong learning, and that philosophy extends to mental health and safety, you are never truly finished. Just as physical health requires consistent care, one healthy choice today does not sustain you for the future. In the same way, mental health demands ongoing attention, maintenance, and a continued commitment to meaningful supports."