



The Pieter's Family Life Center
1025 Commons Way
Rochester, New York 14623

September 13, 2021

Mr. Adam Bello, County Executive
Monroe County, NY
Monroe County Office Building
39 W. Main Street
Rochester, New York 14614

Senator Samra G. Brouk
230 Packets Landing
Fairport, New York 14450

Dear County Executive Adam Bello & Senator Samra G. Brouk;

I am Lawana Jones, Founder & Chief Executive Officer of The Autism Council of Rochester, Inc. I also serve as the Chairperson of the Monroe County Office of Mental Health Community Services Board, Developmental Disabilities Sub-Committee, and was recently appointed to The Governor's New York State Development Disabilities Advisory Council.

As you both know, over the last several years, our community has continued to experience tremendous challenges regarding mental health and equal access and delivery of these services. Unfortunately, it also appears as if children in crisis, for some reason, are not even on the radar to receive a much-needed increase in Mental & Behavioral Health services and supports in our community. I know because I have responded numerous times to calls for children in crisis in the African American Community and other ethnic groups over the last several years, including the City of Rochester and surrounding towns. The response from Behavioral Health professionals in this space has been dismal at best. And I am writing to get your assistance to address this significant community issue.

In March 2018, Trevyon Rowe, a 14-year-old Rochester City School student with Autism, died in the Genesee River. A subsequent report from the New York State Attorney General's office and the New York State Education Department found "systemic failures." They stated that the young Trevyon was failed at every level, from mental health and special education services to procedures to keep students safe at school. I have also come to the knowledge that this young student was a victim of episodes of bullying and harassment within the school setting, which, as we know, puts children and young adults at risk for increased stress, anxiety, trauma, suicidal ideation, and attempted suicide.

Facts from The Center For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 14- to 24-year-olds.
- 15% of high school students seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months, and 7% reported making at least one suicide attempt in the previous year.

Research has shown potential causes can include:

- Children and youth involved in bullying are more likely than those not involved in bullying to be depressed, have high levels of suicidal thoughts, and have attempted suicide.
- Children who bully and are bullied by their peers (often called "bully-victims") are at the most significant risk for suicidal thoughts and behavior.
- Family history of suicide or child maltreatment.

- History of depression or other mental illness, isolation, impulsive or aggressive tendencies.

I have also consulted with Ms. Carrie Houston, Trevyon's mother. I am writing to urge you to draft legislation, "The Trevyon Rowe Children's & Young Teen Mental Health Community Safety Act." This legislation would potentially prevent the senseless death of another child in our community, like what happened to young Trevyon in March of 2018. Please see the attached, which outlines the proposed draft legislation.

Lastly, a critical component of our 16 years of agency work is advocating ensuring that children and young teens with disabilities in our community receive the vital services and treatment that they need and deserve. As your constituents, we are hoping to work with you to ensure that we improve the safety of our children and young adults in our community.

I am looking forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Lawana Jones

Ms. Lawana Jones, Founder & Chief Executive Officer

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Frank Alkofer, County Legislator, 4th District (Monroe County Legislature)
Dr. April Aycock, Director (Monroe County Office of Mental Health)
Mr. Harry Bronson, Assembly Member 38th District (New York State Assembly)
Mr. Jeremy Cooney, Senator 56th District (New York State Senate)
Mrs. Corinda Crossdale, Deputy County Executive for Health & Human Services (Monroe County)
Ms. Cynthia Elliot, Board Member, Vice-President (Rochester City School District)
Mr. Malik Evans, City Council Member, At-Large (City of Rochester)
Mr. Demond Meeks, Assembly Member 137th District (New York State Assembly)
Ms. Yversha Roman, County Legislator, 26th District (Monroe County)
Mr. Richard V. Tantalo, Director, Department of Public Safety (Monroe County)
Mr. Van White, Esq., Board President (Rochester City School District)
Monroe County School Board Association (Mr. Gary Brackon, President & Mrs. Amy West, Vice-President)

“TREVYON ROWE CHILD & YOUNG TEEN MENTAL HEALTH COMMUNITY SAFETY ACT” (The ACT)

To enact the “*Trevyon Rowe Child & Young Teen Mental Health Community Safety Act.*” Requiring the following:

Local educational agencies (and local governing bodies) to increase coordination with Pediatric Mental & Behavioral Health services providers, community health agencies, local law enforcement, and Public Safety personnel to produce policies, procedures, guidelines, and mandated reporting requirements (including DASA & VADIR) to direct public servants including, Teachers, Administrators, Safety staff, Bus drivers, Social Workers, and other school employees, law enforcement, and Public Safety, on how to respond (including prevention, intervention, and a postvention plan) to “at-risk” children or young teens who have the following;

- Demonstrated suicidal ideation, intentions, or inflicted self-harm
- Been the victims of Bullying, Harassment (defined and as outlined in Senate Bill – S 1987-B (A 3661-C) “Dignity for All Students Act” and including cyberbully in Assembly version A3661, Law Section: Education Law, Add Art 2). Also including the child or young teen being the victim of physical or mental abuse on school grounds.
- Wandered or Eloped from school grounds (or threatened to leave school property).

The Act would also appoint a Commission (adjunct to The Department of Children and Family Services and Office of Mental Health’s Children & Youth Services) to specifically address safety and security of children and young teens in public schools, and also examine and identify any disparate treatment/or provision of Mental and Behavior Health services to children and young teens in Monroe County, and the State of New York. The commission would also examine the effects of COVID-19 on the mental & behavioral health of children and young teens as it relates to returning to school, and identify any racial and ethnic disparities in the delivery of educational supports and services, either virtual or in person.

Lastly, the commission would re-examine and request a modification of the Mental & Behavioral Services under the PROS Program (Personalized Recovery Oriented Services) to allow families to receive stand-alone Mental Health services outside other PROS clinic programs. Enabling the individual to use a private clinician of their choice and still participate in comprehensive assistance through the PROS program will help build natural supports and improve medication management.