

HEALTH

REDUCING RISK



KEVIN RIVOLI, THE CITIZEN

The Cayuga County Community Mental Health Center in Auburn.

State funds aimed at tackling high rural suicide rates

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The state Office of Mental Health is awarding \$660,000 to five counties, including Cayuga, to bolster suicide prevention services and address high suicide rates.

The funding aims to support counties with disproportionately high suicide rates. Cayuga had the highest rate (1,272 per 100,000 people) of suicide-related emergency room visits in 2024, according to the state Department of Health.

Cayuga County's suicide rate was 16.9 per 100,000 people.

The counties awarded funding — Chautauque, Madison, Putnam and Tioga are the others — will each receive \$36,000. That funding will be used to attend the New York State Suicide Prevention Conference, community engagement and to conduct a needs assessment. Those activities will lead to the development of action plans.

The counties will also receive \$48,000 annually over two years to fund the implementation of their action plans.

Maureen Brennan, deputy director of

the Cayuga County Community Mental Health Center, said in a statement provided by the state Office of Mental Health that the county will use the funding to expand Counseling on Access to Lethal Means, or CALM, training, develop community-based initiatives, such as men's sheds, and bolster existing resources.

"Through enhanced collaboration, data-informed planning and capacity building, this project will create sustainable infrastructure to reduce suicide risk, improve behavioral health outcomes and strengthen suicide prevention efforts across our rural communities," Brennan added.

Strengthening suicide prevention efforts, especially in rural areas, is a priority for the state.

The state Office of Mental Health noted that counties with fewer than 200,000 residents had 90% higher suicide rates than urban areas.

The agency has programs aimed at improving mental health in rural areas, including the expansion of certified community behavioral health clinics and crisis stabilization centers. The state has

also expanded the Safe Options Support program to rural communities, according to OMH.

"Although New York remains a national leader in suicide prevention efforts and has one of the lowest suicide rates nationally, even one tragic loss from suicide is far too many," said Dr. Ann Sullivan, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Health. "Our rural communities are at increased risk, and this funding will help them address specific local needs with tailored community-based programming."

According to the state Office of Mental Health, the county-level programs could focus on community- or school-based initiatives. The examples include working with gun shops and ranges on injury and safety prevention, offering behavioral health services within primary care and training providers in suicide safety plan intervention.

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POLITICS

Blakeman slams Hochul on crime while citing actions under Cuomo

ROBERT GAVIN
The Buffalo News

ALBANY — Party enrollment trends and polling suggest that Bruce Blakeman has a lot of work to do to unseat Kathy Hochul as governor of New York.

But despite statistics that suggest otherwise, the Republican candidate thinks he has a winning argument: that Hochul is soft on crime and his record shows his approach will be better for the state.

Neither is so cut and dried.

The Nassau County executive, who has repeatedly bragged about making his county the safest in America while ridiculing Hochul's crime-fighting record, scoffed Wednesday at statistics that showed crime increased under his watch

compared to his predecessor.

In a news conference outside the New York Republican State Committee headquarters in Albany, Blakeman blamed the pandemic for the rise in index crimes and violent crimes after he took office in January 2022. Blakeman, who has blamed Hochul for crime increases covering the same period of time, then lashed into the incumbent for several state actions he said have aided criminals — even though each took place during the term of Gov. Andrew Cuomo, Hochul's predecessor.

"It's a revolving door of criminality in our state," Blakeman said. "Don't even try to compare my record with hers."

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JOSEPHINE STRATMAN, NEW YORK DAILY NEWS VIA TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Republican gubernatorial candidate Bruce Blakeman lashed into Gov. Kathy Hochul for several state actions he said have aided criminals — even though each took place during the term of Gov. Andrew Cuomo.