



NEWS FROM **ULSTER COUNTY** County Executive Jen Metzger

******For Immediate Release******

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Ulster County Continues Community Engagement on Behavioral Health Needs Assessment with Public Listening Session

KINGSTON, NY - The Ulster County Department of Mental Health, in coordination with the Community Services Board and the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI), is advancing its Countywide Behavioral Health Needs Assessment with a community listening session on Sunday, August 10, 3:30 - 5 PM, at Saint James Church, 29 Pearl Street in Kingston.

This session is part of a broader initiative to strengthen Ulster County's behavioral health system, making it more responsive, equitable, and accessible to all. Residents, service providers, caregivers, and community partners are invited to share their stories, challenges, and ideas. Input gathered will directly inform a five-year strategic plan shaping future policies, investments, and programs.

"This work is about listening to our community — especially those most affected by gaps in the system — and creating a roadmap for a behavioral health system that truly meets people where they are," **said Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger**. "We want to support solutions that address people's real needs, based on their lived experience and the insights of practitioners working in the field, and this assessment will help us chart the path forward."

The Behavioral Health Needs Assessment aims to identify local strengths, service gaps, and areas for improvement across mental health, substance use, and intellectual and developmental disability services. Led by HSRI, a nationally recognized organization known for its expertise in inclusive behavioral health planning, the project reflects Ulster County's commitment to data-driven and community-centered decision-making.

The August 10 listening session will include free food, and Spanish and ASL interpretation will be available. Sensory rooms will also be provided to ensure a comfortable and inclusive experience for all participants.

“Too often, decisions about behavioral health systems are made without directly engaging those most impacted,” **said Joleen Darby, Special Projects Director at the Ulster County Department of Mental Health.** “This project is about changing that. We’re creating space for real conversations — with residents, providers, families, and advocates — so we can build a system that reflects the diverse realities of our community. Listening is the first step toward lasting, equitable change.”

This event is one of several opportunities for public participation in the Behavioral Health Needs Assessment. For additional information and future engagement opportunities, visit <https://participate.ulstercountyny.gov/behavioral-health-needs-assessment>.

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