



OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Vermont State House
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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

Lt. Governor Molly Gray Holds “Seat at the Table” on Mental Health Care Access and Vermont’s Youth

Montpelier, Vt. — This afternoon, Vermont Lieutenant Governor Molly Gray moderated a panel discussion on mental health care access as a part of the “Seat at the Table” virtual meeting series.

The discussion, titled “Mental Health Care Access and Vermont’s Youth”, featured Fatima Khan, Youth Advocate from the Vermont Youth Lobby; Lexi Lacoste, Youth Advocate from Burr Burton Academy; Danielle Lindley, Director of Children, Youth and Family Services for Northwestern Counseling Supports & Services; Christian Pulcini, MD, MEd, MPH, Pediatric Emergency Medicine Physician. Over 70 attendees joined the meeting and the conversation highlighted the need for greater access to and support of mental health care services in the state, particularly for young Vermonters.

“Vermonters, particularly young Vermonters, need robust access to affordable mental health care options,” Lt. Governor Gray said “Today’s ‘Seat at the Table’ highlighted the ways young Vermonters’ mental health has been impacted by the on-going COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges the state faces in making mental health care services accessible.”

In November, Lt. Governor Gray shared her [Recover Stronger Agenda for Vermont](#) with the Governor and Legislature. The Agenda outlines actions that could be taken on some of Vermont’s most pressing issues. Recommendations on mental health care access include:

- Setting a longer-term, sustainable budget for Vermont’s designated mental health agencies allowing them to avoid year-to-year funding struggles and to invest in systems and a workforce that meets community needs.
- Supporting workforce retention by including cost of living adjustments for staff in state funding.
- Supporting recruitment efforts by expanding student load forgiveness programs for those who choose a career in mental health care and invest in Vermont-based workforce development programs.
- Adjusting Medicaid reimbursement rates to adequately compensate designated mental health agencies and care providers for the care they provide.



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"We have to improve our mental health systems and provide more funding because if we want to save lives and save futures, we have to take concrete steps to improve access, to help youth find the care that they need and that they deserve," said Fatima Khan.

"Unfortunately no one is immune from the impact of Covid-19 and our youth are no exception. As a system of care, we continue to experience an increase in the need for mental health supports for youth," Danielle Lindley said, "Our system is overwhelmed, under resourced and in order to support Vermont's youth and their families adequately, we must invest in not only crisis driven supports but also get upstream and invest in our home and community-based supports if we want healthier outcomes for our youth."

"We talk about it. We stop sitting down and being scared. Don't get me wrong, it is terrifying standing in front of people and talking about mental health, but nothing will ever compare to the feeling of sitting in my room and staring at that bottle of pills," said Lexi Lacoste, while addressing the need to end stigmas around accessing mental health care services.

"Children should be in school, learning. Children should be at home, developing. And when needed, children must be able to receive appropriate mental health services in the right setting at the right time to get back to the aforementioned activities. The state must prioritize funding for these services," said Christian Pulcini.

The tri-weekly series hosted every third Monday from 12:00pm – 1:00pm features community, non-profit, and business leaders from across Vermont. Launched by Lt. Gov. Gray in 2021, each "Seat at the Table" will be open to the public, lawmakers and press and will highlight topical issues facing Vermont communities. Recordings of the panel discussions can be viewed [here](#).

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