

KEVIN BYRNE
County Executive

MICHAEL J. PIAZZA, Jr.
Commissioner

SARA SERVADIO
Deputy Commissioner



**DEPARTMENTS OF MENTAL HEALTH
SOCIAL SERVICES AND YOUTH BUREAU**

September 28, 2023

Supervisor Hay,

Thank you for your correspondence to Legislative Chairman Jonke and Legislator Castellano seeking additional details and clarification regarding the stabilization center in Putnam County. County Executive Byrne has also reviewed your correspondence and has requested I respond directly to address the Southeast Town Board's various questions and concerns.

I understand the importance of having correct and clear information, specifically around a new program or resource forming in a community, which is why I have worked diligently to be forthcoming and transparent throughout this process, speaking and corresponding with you and your office since late July as well as presenting at the Putnam County Legislature numerous times including at the more recent Health Committee meeting in August. In both cases, the Administration made a concerted effort to highlight the purpose of this center as well as its location.

The stabilization center will be run by a not-for-profit agency, People USA, who has successfully operated the Dutchess County Stabilization Center since 2017. The first of its kind in New York State, the Dutchess County site provides an environment that is designed to assist individuals and children away from traumatic environments and experiences, and on a voluntary basis, so that the success of recovery is greater. It is worth noting that the majority of the adult, adolescent and child clients that seek services at the Dutchess site are presenting with symptoms of anxiety, and stabilization centers provide assistance to residents for nonemergency related health matters. Please remember that recovery looks different for every person and the range of support received at the center depends on the individual needs.

We have read the emails from the residents of the Town of Southeast, those sent directly and those forwarded by you, and will be inviting them to participate in an upcoming forum so that their questions and concerns can be both heard and addressed, and so this office may be afforded the opportunity to provide them more timely and accurate information about this important initiative. We also plan to invite them, and any interested members of your town board, to schedule a visit at the Dutchess County Stabilization Center. Additional information about the center and People USA can be accessed at their website at <https://people-usa.org/>.

To clarify, the stabilization center in Putnam County is not a mandated program. However, New York State Mental Hygiene Law requires each county to direct and administer a local comprehensive planning process. As a result, the Putnam County Department of Mental Health, Social Services and Youth

Bureau, together with our provider agencies, develop annually a comprehensive local plan for mental hygiene services that identifies the needs and gaps in the system of care for individuals with mental illness, developmental disabilities and those that are dealing with alcohol and other drug abuse. The two highest prioritized unmet needs in Putnam County's system of care have consistently been a mobile crisis team and a stabilization center.

Last year, the Legislature and prior Administration committed \$2,500,000 of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to help People USA with start-up costs. While it was appropriated by the previous Administration, County Executive Byrne has made it clear that opening a stabilization center in Putnam County is a priority of his Administration, as well. People USA will be licensed by the New York State Office of Mental Health and Office of Addiction Services and will earn revenue through the health insurance system, which will sustain the center. The Department of Mental Health, Social Services and Youth Bureau will work closely with the center and maintain collaboration. All agencies licensed by NYS that either receive state funding passed through Putnam County or that receive funding directly from the county must have a contract. Except for the initial ARPA funding provided by the county, the agency will operate independently from insurance revenue.

The center will occupy office space that was previously occupied by a New York State Office of Mental Health outpatient treatment program. It's noteworthy that more recently Mental Health Association of Putnam County (MHA) also had its office space in the same building where it served clients including those seeking services and support through the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer to Peer Program back when MHA was the providing agency for Putnam County. The County is not renting the space or operating the center, and People USA has worked its lease agreement directly with the landlord.

The Office of Mental Health continues to encourage the development of stabilization centers. There are currently 24 centers becoming operational throughout the state with 3 centers already open. People USA will be opening the Putnam County and Westchester County center modeled after the successful Dutchess County center that they have operated for six years.

The center requires adequate space to support multiple services to families and children in a professional setting. People USA employed a realtor in the county to identify space that meets this need. 2505 Carmel Avenue provided the agency with the opportunity to develop the space to their specifications, including a private entrance and separate parking lot in the back of the building. The location's proximity to Putnam Hospital and access for individuals in need of services was also an important consideration when viewing locations.

The day care center at 2505 Carmel Avenue is well known to the Department of Mental Health, Social Services and Youth Bureau, as it partners with the day care center through the NYS Child Care Program. The County has also supported the application of the day care center to provide various specialized programs to our youngest children. The day care center is a tenant at 2505 Carmel Avenue. Its lease agreement is a separate contract between the day care center and property owner. It is also well known that the day care center operated in that location when a previous tenant provided an outpatient mental health treatment program in the same location the center will be located. It is also noteworthy that between 40%-50% of the individuals receiving support from the Dutchess County Stabilization

Center are children and adolescents brought there by parents or referred by school districts. This staggering statistic could very well extend into Putnam County in a post-pandemic environment.

In our efforts to aid People USA in an extensive search for space, we have been unable to secure appropriate space in a centrally located medical building. People USA and the Putnam County local government unit had multiple meetings with Putnam Hospital Center seeking to find appropriate space on the grounds of the hospital. Three locations were discussed over approximately 12 meetings. Ultimately, there was no space that met the required specifications for the center.

Throughout the past 19 months, the Department of Mental Health, Social Services and Youth Bureau have reported at regular intervals to the Legislature on the progress that was being made. They were officially made aware of the location in Southeast when I presented before the Health Committee on August 8th.

A stabilization center will be an enormous benefit to the mental health of our residents, especially children, in crisis. We will be in contact with all those who have communicated their concern about this issue, and when we schedule the forum to discuss the center in the coming weeks, we'll make sure your office is aware.

If there are questions that were not addressed directly in this letter, please feel free to contact me directly and know you are welcome to participate at the upcoming forum.

Thank you,



Michael J. Piazza, Jr.
Commissioner

CC: County Executive Byrne & Leg. Jonke and Castellano