

Madam Attorney General,

My name is Carmen Torres, the Parent Leadership Manager at the Children's Agenda located in Rochester NY. The Children's Agenda advocates for effective policies and drives evidenced-based solutions for the health, education and success of children. We are especially committed to children who are vulnerable because of poverty, racism, health inequities and trauma. We recently added a strong advocacy voice of parents and grandparents that have been advocating for mental health and were excited to talk to you in Buffalo. Unfortunately, not one made the speakers list and we had to cancel our trip. So instead, we are submitting our speeches and will livestream the event.

After countless mental health planning meetings, marching, petition collecting which resulted in 548 signatures, speaking to the school board as a whole, speaking one on one to each commissioner in the school board as well as the superintendent our parents, grandparents, community leaders and mental health professionals came together to ensure that our school district organize and fund proper mental health programs that will help serve our neediest of children. We asked that they play a crucial role in our children's mental health and social emotional healing plan as schools reopened

In Rochester alone RCSD students had to wait 544 days between the shift to fully remote learning in March 2020 and the return of fulltime, in-person learning in September 2021. Students returned to school after experiencing prolonged periods of social isolation, food insecurity, homelessness, the death of loved ones/caregivers along with a surge in community violence. It is evident that our children are experiencing ongoing trauma from all these hardships. There have been over 800 plus shootings and over 150 homicides in Rochester since April 2020, as well as over 1,815 deaths in Monroe County from COVID-19. I also would like to say that even before covid children's mental health needs were already at a growing peak.

The facts are that the total amount of loss, disruption, economic hardship, and trauma is the most children have had to face in several generations. I ask that you help our children and their families by supporting and investing in more social emotional professionals that can help in what has been 2 plus years of devastating trauma and to fix a broken system so that children receive what they need. We ask that you use grants or other funding or to come together with legislators and other politicians to develop a state plan that can begin the healing process for our New York's future... our children.

Thank you.

Carmen Torres