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PFLAG SALISBURY AND TRUE YOU MARYLAND HOST YOUTH SUICIDE EVENT

In response to a startling increase in suicidal ideation among LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual) youth and recent research findings, Salisbury PFLAG and True You Maryland have partnered to offer a free suicide prevention workshop focusing on LGBTQIA+ youth. Scheduled for May 9th from 6-8 pm, the event at the Wicomico Youth and Civic Center, will include free food and refreshments, engaging expert presenters, and organizations exhibiting information and distributing resources.

The Williams Institute estimates that 10% of youth ages 13-17 are LGBT. A report released on April 1st by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that measured suicidality during the pandemic found that LGBTQIA+ youth reported greater levels of mental health challenges, emotional abuse in their home, and suicide attempts than their peers. More specifically, one in four teenagers who identified as LGBTQIA+ said they had attempted suicide in the first half of 2021, and 48.6% of LGBTQIA+ teens reported having seriously considered suicide.

The LGBTQIA+ community is not monolithic but rather represents a varied range of identities and expressions of gender and sexual orientation. Additionally, members of the LGBTQIA+ community are diverse in terms of race, religion, ethnicity, disability status, nationality and socioeconomic class. This diversity means that many in the LGBTQIA+ community have overlapping identities - known as intersectionality. The National Alliance for Mental Illness explains that the LGBTQIA+ community is disproportionately faced with discrimination, prejudice, bullying, denial of access to services and activities, stigmatization, alienation, and family rejection which can lead to feelings of hopelessness and sadness and which compound for those with intersecting racial or socioeconomic identities.

We are in the midst of a national mental health crisis that is particularly amplified for marginalized young people experiencing multifactorial discrimination. Further, youth today are watching their identities be attacked in the media by lawmakers seeking to erase them from American schools. Fortunately, we have the knowledge and research-based prevention strategies to support and respond to youth whose mental health may be under stress. And, there is an opportunity for all of us to play a role in youth suicide prevention.

The objectives for the Suicide Prevention Workshop with Focus on LGBTQIA+ Youth are to highlight the prevailing factors that increase youth suicide risks, provide tools and resources for intervention with focus on concrete strategies for parents and other adults, address opportunities for improving communication surrounding suicide, and discuss lethal means and opportunities for improvement in gun safety. The workshop is being held in the Danang Room of the Wicomico Youth and Civic Center located at 500 Glen Avenue in Salisbury, Maryland. The doors will open at 6:00 pm in order to give attendees time to get food and visit partner organizations distributing resources and information. The presentation will begin at 6:30 pm and include experts in LGBTQIA+ youth mental health, crisis intervention, and suicide prevention.

True You Maryland unites partners in six rural Maryland counties—Allegany, Washington, Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester to advance the sexual health and well-being of youth here at home. Relying on diverse teams, True You Maryland, brings together young people, parents, health departments, local school systems, universities, community programs, and systems not typically engaged in adolescent health initiatives.

Salisbury PFLAG was founded in 2015 and is a chapter of the largest LGBTQIA+ and ally organization in the nation. PFLAG envisions a world where diversity is celebrated, and all people are respected, valued, and affirmed, inclusive of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. By meeting people where they are and collaborating with others, PFLAG realizes its vision by providing support for families, allies, and people who are LGBTQIA+; providing education about the unique issues and challenges facing people who are LGBTQIA+; and providing advocacy in the community to change attitudes and create policies and laws that achieve full equality for people who are LGBTQIA+.

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