Advocacy Letter

**Advocacy Letter**

November 25, 2019

The Honorable Lamar Murray

Senate Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray,

My name is Angela Weatherly. As a social worker, I am writing to request you to increase the screening of mental illness. Although in the past screening programs for mental health problems have been implemented they were without any consideration of effectiveness and clinical and ethical implications. Mental health reforms have great potential to improve the health and wellbeing of a patient. To do so, improvements should focus on increasing access to mental health care. Policies also recognize that social factors such as minority status, early life experience and exposure to violence put individuals at greater risk of developing a mental health problem. It will be more helpful if proper funding necessary to support the need for mental health illness are provided. Although mental health parity is supported that includes expanding health insurance coverage regardless of mental and medical health diagnosis. More than 68 million people in America are suffering from psychiatry and substance use disorder. There is a great need to reduce the stigma associated with a mental health issue, increase funding for psychiatry research and achieve parity for substance use disorder and mental health problems (Olfson, Blanco, & Marcus, 2016). There is a need to strengthen mental health parity. Funds should be provided to combat mental health problems among individuals and the community.

I commend you for addressing this issue which would require new guidance. I believe that health care barriers should be addressed such as mental health care insurance barriers. There has never been an appropriate time to discuss the mental health issue. In the last few years attitudes have changed dramatically and the society and media as a whole are now more focusing on mental health issues. However, not much work has been done in addressing the social factors underpinning the individuals and community mental health issues and the importance of working with people in the community.

I am one in nearly 100 mental health social workers working with people in the community. We daily see people with different mental health issues. Although the psychological and psychiatric interventions have been in place, I believe that long term recovery of individuals is strengthened if their social circumstances such as finances, employment, housing, and relationship are also addressed. That's where the role of social workers come.

My role is different from other health care providers because I offer both therapeutic and practical help to individuals. I am trained to look not just on the individual but also at the importance of communities and people around them. I look at how to address loneliness and isolation by helping individuals in building network support and to provide something more meaningful within the community. I do this by connecting them with groups and individuals that can help them in recovery. As a social worker, I believe that social approaches lead to a long-lasting recovery and it also removes the stigma associated with mental health issues.

This issue is very important to me. I was diagnosed with depression after my dad left us. At that time I was having thoughts of taking my own life and also harmed myself. My family suffered a lot just because of me. I was struggling with my loss of identity. But with the support of my family and friends, I build confidence after identifying my abilities and strength. This is a reason due to which I am trained to understand and assess and mental health problems experienced by individuals, communities, groups, and families (Golightley & Goemans, 2017). As a social worker, I believe that future planning and investment in mental health care service delivery by innovative social work practices, programs, and research activities should be carried out.

Sincerely

**References**

Golightley, M., & Goemans, R. (2017). *Social work and mental health*: Learning Matters.

Olfson, M., Blanco, C., & Marcus, S. C. (2016). Treatment of adult depression in the United States. *JAMA internal medicine, 176*(10), 1482-1491.