

May 10, 2021

**My testimony for the Senate Finance Subcommittee  
Behavioral Health Care Hearing May 12, 2021  
By Malkia Newman**

*“I was born by the river, in a little tent. Then I go to my brother, I say brother help me please. It’s been too hard living, but I’m afraid to die. It’s been a long, a long time coming, but I know, a change is gon come, oh yes it will.”*

Good afternoon members of the U.S. Senate, staff, and guests. I am very honored to be asked to give testimony to this distinguished body today. I want to especially thank Health Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow and Ranking Member Steve Daines for convening this vitally important discussion.

My name is Malkia Newman, and I am living proof that the services and supports that are available through our community mental health system work. I am not naive to the fact that there are many areas that need to be improved. But I know that that my life would not be the amazing life that I’m living now had I not received treatment for Bipolar Disorder almost 20 years ago.

I am a survivor of childhood sexual trauma, as well as a survivor of inter-generation trauma, a sad legacy of slavery and discrimination. I wrestled with suicidal thoughts, had difficulties maintaining relationships or employment. My daughter Tracie, who I call my miracle, was my reason for living when all hope was gone.

Mental health conditions are very prevalent in my family, the treatments, and hospitalizations that my brother Ronnie endured, who had schizophrenia, terrified me which made it harder for me to ask for help until there was no other option available.

Fast forward 20 years. I have 15 years of continuous employment with CNS Healthcare's Anti-Stigma Program, I've been a homeowner for 9 years, and on June 5<sup>th</sup> my husband Dubrae and I will celebrate our 15<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. I have reconciled with my family and I serve as an ordained minister at my church, New Birth International of Pontiac, MI. My list of community service awards and recognitions is long. I have provided a copy of my resume as part of my testimony.

I am living proof, I am an advocate, and I am proud to speak on behalf of those who have not yet found their voice. It is vitally important that we not just continue to offer behavioral treatment, but that we prepare for the increased need that the pandemic has created. We need more qualified providers, doctors, nurses, therapists, and other support personnel, especially Peer Support Specialists, persons with lived experience and expertise in the mental health field that can encourage and educate people receiving services in a richer way than other professionals can. We need to compensate our professionals at every level, to make sure that we have qualified, culturally, and linguistically competent people meeting the needs of people no matter what their background.

The Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, CCBHCs, have made it easier for people to access services regardless of if they have insurance or not, which in the past created a huge barrier to people needing help.

Integration of physical and mental health has been a topic of discussion for many years. Integration is needed to help people with mental health disorders live longer, healthier lives, but the focus has shifted from people getting whole health treatment from head to toe, to an argument about who will administer the dollars associated with the treatment.

I believe that people served, and their loved ones, should have a role in shaping what healthcare should be, as people with intimate knowledge of what works and what doesn't. Advisory groups can and should be involved at every level of

program development, implementation, and evaluation. The finished product would be more efficient and cost effective as well.

It is my prayer and hope that we will not rush to get back to “normal” at the expense of programs and systems that work.

Sincerely yours,

Malkia Maisha Newman