



February 6th, 2020

Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 249 and House Bill 249

“Kristi L. Bennett Mental Health Parity Act”

My name is Katherine Melton, I am the Founder and Executive Director of the mental health nonprofit, Rediscovering You. On behalf of Rediscovering You, I thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 249 and House Bill 249; the “Kristi L. Bennett Mental Health Parity Act”.

I have had the honor of working within the field of mental and physical health for the past eight years; many of which were served on the prevention side in various capacities serving ages 5 and older. Within recent years, I have begun to transition more into an intervention role in addition to prevention work.

According to results from SAMHSA's 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), in 2018, approximately 47.6 million adults (18+) had any mental illness (AMI) in the past year, including an estimated 11.4 million adults who had a serious mental illness (SMI) (NSDUH, 2018). Any mental illness (AMI), as defined by SAMHSA within the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, was defined as having ‘any mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder in the past year that met DSM-IV criteria (excluding developmental disorders and SUDs)’. In addition to the 47.6 million adults 18 and older who reported having had AMI in the past year, an additional 19.3 million adults reported having had a substance use disorder (SUD)(NSDUH, 2018). In looking at co-occurring disorders, 9.2 million (3.7%) adults reported having both an AMI and SUD (NSDUH, 2018). With the rise in mental illness and mental health crisis, we must also recognize the public health problem being faced across the United States; that being suicide.

In 2017, SAMHSA reported that over 47,000 people in the United States had died by suicide, with increases by over 30% in 25 states between the years of 1999 to 2016 (NSDUH, 2018). An even larger number of adults, approximately 10.7 million to be exact, responded to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health that they had thought seriously about trying to kill themselves within the past year. Of those who had seriously thought about suicide, 3.3 million had made plans, and 1.4 million having made a nonfatal suicide attempt (NSDUH, 2018).

Reading the data can be alarming, but it is important that those reading this testimony not lose sight of the individuals and loved ones behind each statistic. Rediscovering You, a Kansas City based mental health nonprofit, was established not only because of the growing number of individuals needing support for mental health or mental illness, but out of the continual increase in number of individuals ready to seek mental health treatment, whether that be pharmaceutical, psychological, inpatient and

outpatient treatment programs, or other evidence-based practices, only to be denied the care that they need and deserve as a result of insurance coverage. As reported in the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, approximately 11.2 million adults with any mental illness (AMI)(23.6%) reported having a perceived unmet need for mental health care within the past year; a number which is higher than those in most years from 2008 to 2017 (NSDUH, 2018). This trend was consistent with those with serious mental illness (SMI) with 5.1 million adults with past year serious mental illness having a perceived unmet need for mental health care, and 36.1% of those adults with a SMI not having received any mental health services within the last year (NSDUH, 2018). We, as a community, are responsible for addressing these gaps, and working collaboratively to identify possible solutions for better health outcomes.

To help provide comprehensive supports and give the community the opportunity to receive the help deserved, Rediscovering You has been providing financial assistance to those who are uninsured or underinsured get the mental health care needed. Nearly 75% of those currently being served by Rediscovering You did in fact have health insurance, however, were unable to cover the cost of care due to the increasing price of seeking help. Within the brief six months that Rediscovering You has been established, financial assistance has been provided for travel to treatment out of state, travel to mental health appointments in order to stay in compliance and maintain housing individuals were provided, and coverage for mental health treatment appointments. Even with the supports provided by Rediscovering You, we have only been able to scratch the surface of an even greater need.

Through the passing of bills such as the “Kristi L. Bennett Mental Health Parity Act”, not only can we, as a community, come together to recognize that physical health is equal to mental health, but that both are deserving of, and in need of equal opportunities for treatment. Your consideration and support of the “Kristi L. Bennett Mental Health Parity Act” can also help the community achieve better mental health outcomes, begin to address the public health crisis that the rising rates of mental illness and suicide are, and begin to create a better, brighter, and healthier future for those who currently face mental illness, and for our future children who, too, may be diagnosed with a mental illness.

I first want to thank the family of Kristi Bennett who have bravely shared her story in order to bring change to our community and for all those impacted by mental illness. I also thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide my perspective, the perspective supported by Rediscovering You, and for your consideration of the “Kristi L. Bennett Mental Health Parity Act”.

Katherine Melton, MPH, MCHES

Founder and Executive Director of Rediscovering You

katherine@rediscovering-you.org

(913) 242-2113

www.rediscovering-you.org

