



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 15, 2015

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY DELIVERS REMARKS AT ANNUAL
LEADERSHIP MEETING FOR NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS
NYC CHAPTER**

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Sandy. Thank you for that lovely introduction, and for devoting your life to dismantling structural racism and advancing social justice. The New York City chapter of this distinguished organization is fortunate to have you representing them.

I also want to give a big shout out to Dr. Robert Schachter, who is celebrating his 25th anniversary as your Executive Director. I think he deserves a round of applause, don't you?

And let's show some love for the dynamo who put this wonderful event together—Christina Perez, Chair of the Event Committee. Thank you, Christina!

And thank you, all of you, for inviting me here today. I can't tell you how delighted I was to receive your invitation. Because in my household, social workers are a big deal.

In fact, I have a bit of family news I think all of you should be the first to hear: My daughter, Chiara, has informed us that she wants to become a social worker. Needless to say, Bill and I are both very proud!

This past summer, Chiara interned at a health agency to see some of the work you do firsthand, and she absolutely loved it. Every night she came home with stories about how her coworkers connected with a troubled young person or moved heaven and earth to help someone who had nowhere else to turn. Before the internship was over—she was hooked.

After she graduates, her plan is to come back to New York—that's more good news for Bill and me! And she is exploring getting her Masters in Social Work. So, one day in the not-so-distant future, she may be a proud NASW member herself.

Like many of you, Chiara's passion for social work is rooted in personal experience.

A few years ago, she revealed to Bill and me that she was suffering from anxiety, depression and addiction.

It was such a tough time. I wished that I could hold her and love her and make it all go away. I felt everything you'd expect a mother to feel: love, sadness, fear, and a whole lot of uncertainty.

Here was our child, in terrible pain. But because the pain was in her brain and not another part of her body, there were no established steps to follow.

Bill and I had to trust the recommendations of people we didn't really know. And we had to make some major decisions based on faith.

Our family got lucky. We eventually found enough of what we were looking for. We found people—people like all of you—who helped our daughter regain her mental equilibrium.

I'm happy to report that Chiara is now kicking butt in recovery and has become an advocate for other young people struggling with these issues.

But even after our family's crisis subsided, we could not forget how afraid and helpless we felt. And how difficult Chiara's journey was.

We all knew that we had to do everything possible to help other families struggling with mental illness—especially those who don't have the same advantages as us.

For Chiara, that means pursuing social work. For Bill and me, it means working with our colleagues to make New York City a global leader on mental health.

Since Bill took office, the de Blasio Administration has committed approximately \$350 million in additional mental health funding over the next three years.

That money will go towards things like placing Licensed Clinical Social Workers in ALL of the City's 72 contracted Family Shelters. These dedicated professionals will support 8,900 families that are homeless.

It will go towards expanded access to effective treatment in jail—so people have a real chance at rehabilitation.

It will go towards providing staff at community-based organizations with training on how to identify clients who might be dealing with a mental health condition, how to lead peer groups, and how to teach their clients coping skills.

In short, this money will go towards providing social workers and other mental health professionals with the resources you need to reach people where they need help, when they need help.

But as you all know, money alone cannot fix everything. What we desperately need is a citywide plan of action.

Back in January, I announced that the City will develop a Roadmap for Mental Health. The Roadmap will:

Quantify the challenges we face. Because every New Yorker needs to understand that we are facing a mental health crisis—one that directly affects one in five adult New Yorkers in any given year.

The Roadmap will establish the principles that will guide our effort to meet those challenges—principles like “Act Early” and “Partner with Communities.”

The Roadmap will present an array of solutions that build upon our principles.

And the Roadmap will lay out a plan for achieving long-term change.

Since the announcement, I’ve been traveling all over the city, talking to people on the frontlines about what is working, and what needs to be fixed.

I meet so many remarkable New Yorkers who are giving everything to this work.

Many of them don’t get paid nearly as much as they should.

Many of them don’t get nearly enough training or support for what is one of the toughest jobs in the entire city.

Many of them have great ideas that have gone unheard for far too long.

And you won’t be surprised to learn that many of them are social workers.

I never met a social worker who was not inspiring, and who did not have a compelling story to tell. Tonight, I’d like to share three of them with you.

Roy Kearse is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who works at Samaritan Village and spoke movingly about the substance abuse treatment programs they provide to veterans. Roy also happens to be a Vice President at NASW, and he is here with us tonight. Roy, thank you so much for your service!

I also met Isabel Ching, a MSW who taught me about how she and her colleagues at Hamilton-Madison House uses tools like origami to help seniors deal with depression.

And I met Yajahira Valenica, a LCSW who works with young people at M.S. 118 in the Bronx.

While visiting M.S. 118, I had a great conversation with Yajahira and a mother I will call Gloria.

Gloria emigrated here from Mexico and gave birth to three daughters. Unfortunately, their father was abusive.

Eventually, Gloria summoned up enough courage to leave the father. But the violence he inflicted upon the family left deep emotional scars.

One of Gloria’s daughters, who I will call Teresa, began harming herself and had to be hospitalized multiple times.

Luckily, Teresa's teachers were aware of the situation and referred her to the School-Based Mental Health Clinic.

Teresa and Gloria began working with Yajahira, who was born in El Salvador and grew up in Highbridge.

Yajahira spoke their language, both literally and figuratively. She provided Teresa with cognitive behavioral therapy and helped her work through the trauma. And eventually, family life started to get better.

Back in June, Teresa graduated from M.S. 118. And she didn't just graduate—she graduated with honors.

I know this story is familiar to all of you. New York City's social workers are the co-authors of countless success stories.

That's why we are committed to making sure the Roadmap includes a significant role for talented and committed social workers like Roy, Isabel, and Yajahira.

In other words, this isn't just a thank you speech—I'm also here to recruit you!

In order to close the many gaps that exist in our mental health system, we need New York City's social workers by our side.

We need you to continue sharing your hard-won expertise with us.

And we need you to establish an even bigger presence in those communities that have been hit hardest by the mental health crisis.

New York City's social workers—and organizations like NASW—are among our most valuable resources.

You are already vital to the de Blasio Administration's signature initiatives.

You are helping New Yorkers access the new affordable housing we are building—and you're on the frontlines of our effort to make sure they aren't illegally evicted.

You are helping us create more humane and welcoming homeless shelters, where families can find both hope and guidance in their time of greatest need.

And you are helping us provide New Yorkers with Municipal IDs, an essential tool for undocumented immigrants trying to establish a new life here.

Tonight, I ask you to play a central role in our next major push: Creating an effective mental health system.

It is a big ask, to be sure. But I hope you will answer the call, just like you answered the call that led you to social work in the first place.

Jane Addams, one of America's better-known social workers, once said that "Action indeed is the sole medium of expression for ethics."

I believe that is true. And I believe that makes all of you role models and heroes not just for Chiara and other aspiring social workers, but for everyone who recognizes that service is an essential part of life.

On behalf of Mayor de Blasio and the City of New York, thank you, thank you, thank you for all of your hard work. Have a good night everyone!

###