



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

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

**FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY DISCUSSES THE CHALLENGES OF FINDING EFFECTIVE
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND THE INTERSECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND
CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

In an op-ed today, the First Lady speaks out about how difficult it was to find appropriate mental health services for her daughter and makes a commitment to building a mental health system that meets the needs of all New Yorkers.

The First Lady also spoke at the Vera Institute of Justice about the need to provide people with mental health services before they end up in the criminal justice system.

NEW YORK—In an op-ed in today’s New York Daily News, First Lady Chirlane McCray speaks out about her plan to shatter the stigma of mental illness and create a more inclusive treatment system that works for all New Yorkers.

“The first step to solving the crisis is to simply acknowledge that it exists,” writes **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. “We must start a real public conversation about mental illness, and we must start connecting people to appropriate services. That is how we will shatter the stigma.”

The First Lady writes honestly about the difficult process of connecting her daughter, Chiara, to high-quality resources:

“Our search had begun ... when Chiara, then 18 years old, bravely revealed to Bill and me that she was suffering from anxiety, depression and addiction. I felt everything you’d expect a mother to feel: love, sadness, fear and a great deal of uncertainty. Our child was in terrible pain, but because it originated in her brain and not another part of her body, there wasn’t an established series of steps to follow.”

Inspired by her own challenges, the First Lady has made a commitment to making sure all New Yorkers can access the services they need to regain their mental equilibrium.

Over the next few months, the First Lady will visit New Yorkers in all five boroughs to hear some of the stories of people with firsthand experience of the current system. She will meet with teenagers, mothers, people without a home, people in jail, senior citizens and veterans. She will also sit down with service providers and advocates.

The stories she hears will inform the plan the de Blasio administration is developing to build a more inclusive mental health system. This effort will be led by the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City, which the First Lady oversees as chair; the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the Fund for Public Health.

Today, the First Lady also spoke at the Vera Institute of Justice as part of the “Breaking Point” series, a collaboration between Vera and WNYC that examines the “nexus of poverty, mental health and the criminal justice system.”

The First Lady shared her broad vision for a “more enlightened” approach to delivering mental health services – one that features “caregivers who understand the language and culture of the people they serve.”

As an example, she talked about her experience at a Family Resource Center in Jamaica, Queens. The Centers, which are administered by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, provide support to the parents and caregivers of young people who have – or are at risk of developing – emotional and behavioral challenges. They are staffed by Family Advocates who have personal experience with raising a child with special needs, and connecting them to effective programs and services.

To read more about the First Lady’s plan to take on mental health issues in New York City, read the op-ed in the [Daily News](#) and on [FLO.NYC](#).

Click here to learn more about the [Mental Health Roadmap](#).

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