



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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** May 18, 2018  
**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY LEADS NATIONWIDE 3RD ANNUAL  
WEEKEND FOR MENTAL HEALTH WITH FAITH AND COMMUNITY LEADERS,  
MAY 18-20**

*McCray to speak at St. Patrick's Cathedral and other major houses of worship as more than 2,000 houses of worship and community organizations in all 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico join NYC in addressing mental health and addiction*

**NEW YORK**—New York City First Lady Chirlane McCray will speak at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Sunday, May 20 as over 2,000 of houses of worship and community groups across the nation address mental health and addiction in their communities between May 18-20. **Thrive Together: A Weekend for Mental Health** brings together congregations small and large, across faith traditions in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington D.C. Communities have committed to confronting these challenges during their regular weekend meetings, creating one of the largest, most diverse such efforts in the nation.

"This weekend is a historic push to address mental illness and addiction in our communities, without shame," said **New York City First Lady Chirlane McCray, who leads the City's mental health and substance misuse efforts.** "For too long silence and stigma has kept these diseases in the shadows, preventing people from getting the care and services they need to heal. We can make powerful change by recognizing that mental illness and addiction do not affect only one kind of community or one type of person. I am proud to stand with so many houses of worship and community leaders across the nation to find new ways to support one another through these shared challenges. It's time to thrive together."

With one in five Americans experiencing a mental health challenge every year and drug overdoses as the leading cause of death for individuals under the age of 50, **ThriveNYC's Weekend for Mental Health** sparks important conversations about mental illness and addiction to reduce stigma and connect individuals and families with care.

The annual weekend efforts began in 2016 with 1,000 New York City houses of worship and grew to include 2,000 New York City houses of worship and about three dozen cities across the

country in 2017. This year, over 2,000 houses of worship and community groups throughout New York City, all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington D.C. are participating.

Faith and community leaders often act as first responders when it comes to mental illness and addiction, but many do not have the tools they need to address these challenges. **ThriveNYC** has developed resources that will serve as a guide for leaders to engage their congregations and members on the topics of mental health and addiction.

Mayors and elected officials across the country will also visit houses of worship and community gatherings to amplify the message that mental illness and addiction are treatable.

“Under the leadership of New York City First Lady Chirlane McCray, Thrive’s Weekend for Mental Health has grown into a nationwide push for compassion and understanding for those suffering from mental illness and addiction,” said **ThriveNYC Executive Director Alexis Confer**. “New York City is leading the way in the fight to bring these issues out in the open. We’re proud to have communities in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington D.C. join us.”

“I applaud this effort to come together as a community and address some of the most pressing issues impacting our families every day,” said **Congressman Joe Crowley (NY-14)**, Chairman of the House Democratic Caucus. “We must show support and compassion to our neighbors struggling with mental illness and addiction, and the emphasis on a community-driven, faith-based discussion surrounding these issues will welcome the voices we need to hear from most. I thank First Lady McCray for bringing together spiritual leaders across the nation to foster such thoughtful discussions.”

“Too many lives are lost to mental illness and addiction, and a big part of the solution is removing the stigma attached to these diseases so that people feel comfortable asking for help when they need it and the help is there,” said **Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney (NY-12)**. “ThriveNYC and this national weekend for mental health are important community efforts to provide resources New Yorkers need to seek treatment. I applaud First Lady McCray for her advocacy and leadership in these programs.”

“Speaking up about mental health issues in our community is the first step to ending the stigma associated with seeking help. Faith leaders and community organizations play a key role in helping those suffering seek the care they need and it’s crucial that we provide the necessary resources to those struggling with mental health problems and addiction. The First Lady should be applauded for her leadership on this issue,” said **Congressman Hakeem Jeffries, (NY-8)**.

“Mental health impacts each of us and I commend First Lady McCray for today’s effort to build awareness of mental health and overcoming addiction,” said **Congressman Adriano Espaillat (NY-13)**. “There is strength in our faith, and the religious and community leaders who work closely with families, our first responders, and emergency personnel play a critical role in helping individuals overcome mental illness and addiction challenges. Individuals seeking help for mental health issues are strong and should be encouraged along their journey to recovery. We are making tremendous progress in getting individuals the help that they need, and I remain

confident that by working together in unity, we will end the stigma of mental health once and for all.”

“Individuals experiencing mental health conditions often resort to houses of worship for support, so it is crucial we equip the faith-based community with adequate resources to address these calls for help comprehensively. As Chair of the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction, I would like to thank First Lady Chirlane McCray for dedicating efforts to meaningfully engage faith and community leaders,” said **New York City Council Member Diana Ayala**.

“We are at a critical point at which mental health and addiction must be addressed, especially with input from the faith community. People are suffering and our young people are experiencing mental health challenges that too often go unaddressed. The Department of Health and Mental Health found that 27 percent of NYC public high school students report feeling sad or hopeless; eight percent of New York City public high school students have reported attempting suicide, and that percentage doubles with bullying. We know that abuse, neglect, family dysfunction and exposure to violence increases the likelihood that a child will experience the onset of mental health disorders. The high numbers of overdose deaths in our communities are devastating families and taking a toll on our kids. In 2016, I introduced a resolution calling on the Department of Education to have a full-time mental health counselor at every elementary and middle school. I’m happy to see faith and community leaders coming together to tackle these problems,” said **New York City Council Member Fernando Cabrera**.

“Community and spiritual leaders coming together will inspire a new conversation around mental health, in a historic setting as St. Patrick’s Cathedral. I commend the Mayor and First Lady McCray for a dedicated focus and unique approach to addressing mental health,” said **New York City Council Member Keith Powers**.

“Thanks to ThriveNYC, congregations and community organization across our city will share a common focus this weekend -- to end the stigma around mental illness. Faith-based and community groups are critical to this effort as they are often one of the first places that someone struggling with mental health, addiction, or other issues will turn. Thank you to ThriveNYC for the incredible work it is doing to educate the public that mental illness is treatable, and bring mental health services and support to all New Yorkers. ThriveNYC is improving the health of our city, and becoming a model for the rest of the country,” said **New York City Council Member Helen Rosenthal**.

“Mental illness and addiction continue to affect people of all backgrounds in every community across our country. Casting light on these issues is vital to help shed the stigma and prompt widespread awareness and meaningful change. ‘Thrive Together: A Weekend for Mental Health’ sends a strong message that we refuse to sit idly by as people suffer from these conditions. I look forward to seeing how this nationwide effort brings hope and healing to those who struggle with mental illness and addiction,” said **Mayor Francis Suarez, Miami, FL**.

“Not having the proper resources and treatment programs to deal with mental health illness and substance abuse addiction leaves the issue at the ‘doorsteps’ of mayors, police departments,

courts and jail systems. I commend First Lady McCray and all those involved with their continuing advocacy,” said **Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, Springfield, MA.**

“It is imperative that mayors across the Nation urge policymakers to embrace mental health and vote for resources to aggressively address our opioid challenges and aid those who suffer mental health illness and disease. Modern medicine together with expert counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists possess the tools to relieve citizens who suffer unbearable conditions. We would not abandon those who suffer heart disease and we should not abandon those who suffer mental illness! It is not right! It is not fair! Let’s make it right and fair, compassionate, empathetic!” said **Mayor Randall P. Henderson, Jr., Fort Myers, FL.**

“As a community leader, I have had friends, neighbors and family members who have been impacted and, in some cases, died too young due to mental illness and substance abuse. Negative attitudes toward mental illness have prevented people from getting proper treatment, and it is critical that community leaders use all means possible to change this,” said **Mayor Patrick Wojahn, College Park, MD.**

“I am thankful First Lady McCray has been so vocal about these issues. Our community has experienced far more in one year than I could have imagined, ranging from 12 years to 60 years old. The mental illness & substance abuse epidemics are very real & visible in every community—large and small. Susceptibility for those we serve is boundless, with no exemptions for age, race, or socioeconomic status in our diverse communities. We must tailor our approach of education and awareness to best reach our individual and unique communities, based on experiences they can relate to within their circle. This requires collaboration within each community of schools, churches, and governments. However, one thing is certain—we all have to talk openly about it if we are ever going to remove the stigma. The problem has been around for centuries, but now aggravated and escalated by social media abuse, over prescribed opioids, and lack of available treatment facilities. The stigma has our most vulnerable afraid to ask for help for fear of appearing weak. We have been programmed throughout life to believe “only the strong survive”. We are never stronger than we are when we admit we need help during transitional times in our lives. We were not created to do life independently. We were created to serve, to love, & to be loved. We do life together,” said **Mayor Marty Handlon, Alabaster, AL.**

“Rural areas are critically underserved when it comes to mental health and addiction resources. We applaud First Lady Chirlane McCray for her efforts to connect cities like Safford, AZ to this larger movement,” said **Safford City Council Member, Chris Taylor.** “We all benefit by bringing together communities large and small to tackle these issues.”

“Local congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are honored to participate in First Lady Chirlane McCray’s Weekend for Mental Health,” said **Elder David L. Buckner.** “Faith leaders are uniquely qualified to increase understanding and help obtain relief for those who struggle with mental illness.”

“The Hebrew Bible teaches that God is close to the broken-hearted, and as people of faith who seek to walk in God’s ways, we take seriously our responsibility to support and care for the

broken-hearted of our community: those who are suffering from mental illness and those who are trying to care for a loved one who suffers. This Weekend for Mental Health is a critical opportunity for us to shine a light on these issues and let people know: you are not alone,” said **Rabbi Roly Matalón, B'nai Jeshurun.**

“Throughout the United States millions of our neighbors suffer from mental health challenges. It is critically important that religious congregations and faith-based organizations raise awareness that mental illness is treatable, not a moral defect, and not to be stigmatized. We do not classify diabetes and asthma as moral failings. We treat them to provide a better life for both children and adults. We need the same approach for those with emotional problems. Prayer is necessary and good, but needs to be coupled with compassionate and quality professional help. We are happy to join our efforts with those of NYC and first lady, Chirlane McCray to support ‘Thrive Together: A Weekend for Mental Health,’” said **Monsignor Kevin Sullivan, Executive Director, Catholic Charities of New York.**

“We are grateful for this opportunity to open communication on these important issues in our congregation. Many people need to share their experience and it is time that we embrace them in meaningful ways,” said **Rabbi Jordan E. Goldson of B’Nai Israel of Baton Rouge.**

“The Talmud tells us that when someone has something weighing them down, they should share it with others. Obviously “others” refers to people who are only physically separate from the speaker, but are united with them in spirit and sensitive to their concerns. It is incumbent upon the entire community to create an atmosphere in which people who suffer from mental illness or addiction can feel comfortable fulfilling this Talmudic dictum, and get the help they need,” said **Rabbi Yonah Grossman, Director, Chabad Jewish Center of North Dakota.**

“We’re joining other communities across America for the annual Weekend for Mental Health to fight the stigma around mental health and addiction. I believe it’s important to speak openly about mental health. It’s vital that we support those who suffer from mental illness and addiction by breaking down barriers to treatment, decreasing the stigma surrounding mental illness, and by showing genuine compassion and care. Together we can help others find strength and peace in our communities,” said **Kevin M. Smith CEO & Executive Producer Tuacahn Center for the Arts.**

####