



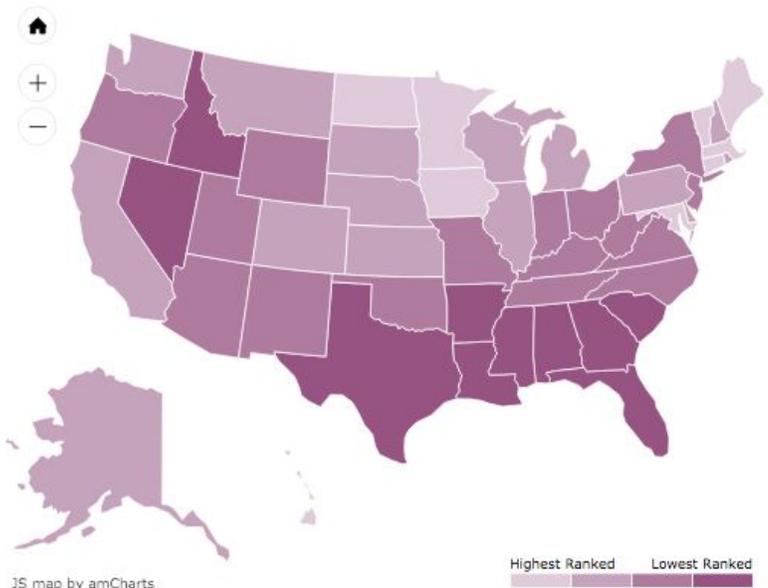
THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY
 YOUTH GOVERNOR WILLIAM HUANG
**COMMISSIONER OF HUMAN SERVICES:
 ANNALYN ST. LEDGER**



Dear Delegates,

The State of New Jersey has vowed to care for its citizens, regardless of their economic status or health, however, we are currently failing them, especially those who are mentally ill. The stigma surrounding mental illness is a huge roadblock in the way of effective reform. The symptoms of mental illnesses are not visible, so many choose to not acknowledge the root cause of this problem despite the undeniably debilitating effects on the citizens of New Jersey. For teenagers alone, suicide is the third leading cause of death causing about 700 deaths in New Jersey per year. While the Department of Human Services has initiatives in place for people who are mentally ill, we must do more to alleviate the pain experienced by the thousands are still unnecessarily and unjustly suffering.

One issue many face under state regulations care for mental illness is consistent shifting from one facility to another due to improper conduct on part of the institution, lack of funding, or inadequate care for that specific person’s need. When being constantly moved, these patients deal with a considerable amount of instability, which can be disastrous and harmful to those who really need it in order to receive proper treatment and truly get better. Additionally, many are unable to receive the care they need. According to Mental Health America, New Jersey is ranked an abysmal thirtieth in states with the largest proportion of citizens who could not



receive treatment for their mental illness due to costs alone. As of 2014, 562,000 people with a mental illness in New Jersey did not receive treatment, and 247,000 reported that they did not receive treatment due to cost. Mental illnesses disproportionately affect lower income citizens of New Jersey, and government-sponsored insurance often doesn't cover mental illness, if one's doctor even accepts insurance. This leaves many people without coverage, without funds, and without care.

The cabinet is looking forward to bills tackling the problem of mental illness within our state. One main goal delegates could focus on is fighting the stigma surrounding mental illness; whether this be accomplished through education, advocacy, or fundraising, awareness must be raised regarding this issue. Furthermore, plans and infrastructure must be established to help those already in a system failing to provide them adequate treatment, and assist those who currently do not receive treatment.

The cabinet and I have faith in you and your bills to address this problem promptly and comprehensively.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Annalyn St. Ledger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Annalyn St. Ledger
Commissioner of Human Services

Sources:

Current Data on Mental Health Care Access Nationwide

<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/issues/mental-health-america-access-care-data>

First Person Account of New Jersey's Care

<http://www.courierpostonline.com/story/news/local/new-jersey/2015/02/07/insiders-new-jerseys-mental-health-system-broken/23008839/>

New Jersey's Department of Human Services Website

<http://nj.gov/humanservices/dmhas/home/>

Identifying Problems with Healthcare in New Jersey

<http://www.courierpostonline.com/story/news/local/south-jersey/2014/09/18/sj-hospitals-focus-mental-health-void/15813037/>