

Denise Amato - Buffalo

Good morning distinguished Attorney General, Mental Health providers, families of Mental health members, and the Buffalo community.

My name is Denise Amato and I am a parent of a 20 year old young man who has suffered for the past four years with his mental health, having been diagnosed with Bi Polar Disorder 2. Let me prefix this by saying that never in my life would I have predicted the horrible challenges that our citizens must deal with when suffering from mental health disorders.

With the severe lack of resources available, often times our only course of action has been to send our loved one by ambulance or ourselves to the emergency room of either ECMC or Niagara Falls Memorial. Good attentive psychologists and psychiatrists are very difficult to find, often with a 2-3 month wait for initial consultation. They claim there also has been an upsurge of patients since our Covid epidemic. They often are too busy or overburdened to ever do any follow up with their patients. The patient is often left feeling uncared about, frustrated and alone to deal with this disorder by themselves. Some providers don't accept certain health insurances, so it becomes a bad game of cat and mouse to find good care.

Instead of being pro-active to prevent hospitalization, we have no recourse. Often you are googling drugs and trying to do anything you can to improve your child's health on your own.

So when your provider doesn't return your phone calls, and things escalate, your child is not sleeping at all and his behavior is becoming erratic, what do you do?? It is the most frustrating feeling in the world!! This is completely unacceptable!! Our citizens deserve so much better!! The two psychiatric emergency departments are overburdened and in turn, the care received at ECMC was horrible for my son. I was depressed, feeling helpless and I often cried after leaving there. It drove me to ask and have a meeting with the COO and VP of Mental Health at ECMC to share our horrible experiences not once, but twice in the months of July and August 2022.

We need more prevention and accessible professionals in our area!! Mental Health should not depend on how fancy your health insurance is. It IS a NECESSITY!!!!!!! Let us work together to create more comprehensive centers to help all those suffering which in turn will lessen the burden on ECMC and Niagara Falls Memorial.

Thank you for your time today!! I am willing to meet with anyone who truly wants to make a positive and necessary improvement in our community's mental health!