

April 13, 2020

National Alliance on Mental Illness  
Attn: Elections 2020  
4301 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22203

Subject: Nomination of Micah Pearson for the NAMI National Board

To Whom It May Concern,

It is my pleasure to nominate Micah Pearson for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) National Board. In the eight years since Micah has joined NAMI Southern New Mexico, he has worked diligently to increase awareness of the importance of Mental Health in people's lives. From his own and his family's experiences, he knows the importance of the work that NAMI does to educate, advocate for, and support people living with mental illness, their family members, and their support systems.

His core focus continues to be to empower those with lived experience of mental health conditions to share their stories and expertise. He believes that those with lived experience better understand the impact mental health conditions have on LGBTQ, veterans, and ethnic communities and are well-suited to raise awareness of the role of gender and cultural differences on stigma and access to treatment. Micah's passion has always been to find ways to address the all-too-frequent negative outcomes that lead persons with mental health conditions to end up in our criminal justice system rather than getting the care they need. Since being elected to the national board in 2017, he's worked to do just that.

In 2017, Micah presented the forensic peer support program he developed in Southern New Mexico at the national convention. The program integrates a trauma-informed system of care and diversion tactics from the Sequential Intercept model with every facet of the criminal justice system to produce a better understanding of the needs of the person struggling with their conditions. Continuing that work in 2019, Micah participated in one of the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) International pilot training classes as a consultant and presenter. This program was cited in their latest best practices guide.

Recognizing that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) starts at home—Micah was one of the voices that called for the establishment and hiring of National's Director of Inclusion & Diversity Officer and has since worked with them to better integrate DEI practices into every facet of NAMI's work.

As chair of the Public Policy committee for the last two years, Micah has worked with the staff to streamline and standardize the platform to make it more accessible and useful to advocates in the field. The process is ongoing, and the goal is to have every position have a simple "one-pager" that can be handed to policy and decision to quickly explain the NAMI position and why we care. This tool has already seen quite a bit of use in multiple states. Now that the position platform standardization is underway, he has encouraged committee members and staff to push NAMI into areas that both reflect the new strategic plan and address issues heard from advocates in the field. Two of which I want to highlight:

Recognizing that all people with mental illness who are incarcerated deserve access to quality mental health treatment, NAMI now officially supports the continuation of Medicaid coverage for people with a mental health condition who are justice-involved and calls for the repeal of the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion. This perfectly aligns with the strategic plan and was something for which NAMI national didn't have an official stance. However, it's the next position that addresses messages he heard from members across the alliance.

Not long into his time on the board, Micah saw that NAMI had no policy positions or statements regarding the LGBTQ communities, and worked to establish NAMI's public policy position calling for the ban of the traumatic and torturous process that is gay conversion therapy. This policy position was passed by the board of the whole in March of 2020.

In 2019, Micah was recognized by the state of New Mexico's Behavioral Health Council for his work in criminal justice reform. In an interview with the Las Cruces Sun-News in 2017, Micah said, "Mental health is only a criminal issue when we have failed them in every possible way." This is the mentality that Micah takes when tackling an issue. To him, it is not about failure, it is about what we have not tried.

To further support this nomination, I would be pleased to express in more detail my personal insights into Micah's unique talents and qualifications, and I would welcome the opportunity to mention additional contacts who would be willing to express their support of the nominee. Please contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alicia Blasingame". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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