

**Testimony before the Mental Health Subcommittee**  
**January 29, 2013**  
**Claudette Pirruccio**

Good afternoon members of the Committee.

My name is Claudette and I am writing this testimony so that you could understand first hand some challenges that people with a mental illness face.

I will focus on my own experience. Ever since I can remember even as a child feeling anxiety and depression. One of the problems was that I didn't know that there was a name for what I was feeling, like this shouldn't be an everyday experience. I used to cry myself to sleep every night while feeling a lot of emotional pain. Starting in kindergarten the teacher realized that I was extremely quiet. When the teacher called on me to answer a question, I always knew the answer. When it came time for me to raise my hand to give the answer, I wouldn't do that. I was put into pre-first grade because I was extremely quiet. Luckily, I was able to start talking more and was put into first grade. While going through elementary school, the teachers always told my parents I was really quiet. I never told anyone that I was painfully quiet. Was in a lot of emotional pain but I never knew that it wasn't normal to feel this pain. I thought that it was normal. I did very good academically throughout all my school years, including high school. I played a couple of sports and was on the National Honor Society. Things got a lot worse in my last year of high school. I was 17 years old. I was severely depressed and delusional. I started to stay in my room by myself and just cry. I would usually be watching TV every night with my family and have ice cream. When I wouldn't come out of my room, I was made fun of by my family.

I finally decided that I was going to commit suicide by taking an overdose because I'd see it all the time on TV. I took the only pills I found in the bathroom, brought them into my room and took them. I fell asleep and then woke up in the middle of the night. I got scared and went to my parent's room, woke them up and kept saying that I don't want to die. I told them that I took all the Tylenol. They had no clue as to what was actually happening. They just told me that I wasn't going to die and that my headache will go away and to go back to sleep. I asked them if they thought they should call the hospital. They called and the hospital told my parent to bring me in to the ER right away. This is how I got into the mental health system and started getting treatment.

I think that because of all the stigma associated with having a mental illness and/or substance abuse a lot of symptoms go unnoticed from school officials and parents. Teachers always knew that I was extremely quiet but never realized that I was actually suffering. Teachers, students and parents need to be more informed about signs and symptoms to look for and know that it's okay to seek help. Mental Illness is a medical illness that needs to be treated like any other medical illness. Parents and students should be able to meet with a counselor in the school and should start learning what symptoms are normal and what to look out for. Young students should have an evaluation every year that is age appropriate. They shouldn't be scared to let someone know if they don't feel well, i.e. feel sad or scared. All this would help to destigmatize mental illness.

Now even though I am an adult, and getting mental health services, it is extremely important to continue these services and be totally honest with my providers and let them know when I am feeling severely depressed, and have suicidal thoughts.

Because of sustained mental health treatment, I am still alive. I need the services that I get now, any changes such as any cuts in services to my providers would be devastating. Hopefully, treatment can be discovered and started in school.

Thank you very much for reading my testimony. It really means a lot.