

Recovered Crack Addict, Tonier Cain, Says Senators Could Make Drug Epidemic Worse



Annapolis, MD – During her 19-year crack addiction, Tonier Cain racked up 83 arrests and 66 convictions. She turned to prostitution to pay for drugs, lost custody of four children, and, when she wasn't locked up, she slept under a bridge. Today, 12-years after completing treatment, Cain penned an open letter to the Senate Health Committee urging them to preserve the mandate for insurers to provide mental health and

substance abuse treatment and continue federal funding for Medicaid expansion.

"I sent the letter to make sure the Senators working to overhaul health care who may be out of touch with the people they serve, get a first-hand account of how treatment changes lives," says Cain. "I urge anyone who has benefitted from treatment to speak out and let our leaders know we matter our struggle matters, and our votes matter. Our triumphs over addiction demonstrate that treating this debilitating illness not only saves lives and communities but also saves money. "

"My untreated crack habit cost U.S. taxpayers millions of dollars," writes Cain, who received treatment after asking a judge to give her a longer sentence so she would be eligible for a substance abuse program. "Limiting access to drug abuse and mental health services will fuel the addiction epidemic and increase costs to taxpayers."

The letter continues, "Treatment paid off. Today, I am a mother, wife, and productive citizen. I'm no longer homeless or in public housing; I became a homeowner. I'm no longer a burden on other taxpayers; I work and pay taxes. I now train public health providers in the courts, prisons and child protection agencies who once served me."

The current plan to replace the Affordable Care Act eliminates essential coverage for drug addiction and mental health services despite the fact that the U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health shows that substance abuse treatment is cost-effective compared with no treatment. The report also determined that substance abuse costs more than \$400 billion annually in crime, health, and lost productivity. If benefits for treatment are cut, it will exacerbate the nation's current opioid crisis.

Since completing treatment in 2005, Cain has become a nationally recognized inspirational speaker and trauma care expert. In addition to encouraging inmates across the country, she has testified before Congress, lectured at Yale University and delivered a keynote speech at the United Nations. Former Gov. Charlie Crist recognized Cain for her contributions to transforming the way the entire Florida Department of Juvenile Justice serves youth.

Cain's poignant memoir, "Healing Neen," and feature-length documentary of the same name, exposes her traumatic childhood

filled with abuse, rape, and neglect, and is also a testament to her amazing resilience. Her compelling story was also featured in Ebony Magazine's Power Issue (2014). Currently, there is a docu-series in development chronicling her work helping prisoners transition from behind bars into their community.

"When people meet me now it's hard for them to believe there was a time when people wouldn't look at me on the streets. I was addicted to drugs and alcohol, homeless, dirty and smelled awful. I'm living proof that treatment is an important weapon in the battle against addiction," adds the founder and CEO of Healing Neen, Inc.

A copy of the open letter to Senate Health Committee can be found online at www.dogonvillage.com/?p=7918. For more information, Tonier Cain visit www.toniercain.com.