

## National Alliance on Mental Illness of Massachusetts – Advocacy Day 2018

### Speech by Taylor Jordon Pinckney

Hello, my name is Taylor Jordon Pinckney. I am seventeen years old and have been living with mental illness as long as I can remember – around 6 years old I think. Today, I will be talking about three things:

1. A little about what it is like to live with it a mental illness
2. An experience I had with the police
3. What I would like to see changed with the police and those that respond to mental illness.

I'm diagnosed with schizophrenia – paranoid type which means that I hear, see, and feel things that are not there. I also have anxiety and some dissociation. So, I lose time and I can do or say things that I do not remember. It is hard to live what some call a normal life or do things most teens do. The hardest part of having a mental illness like mine is the hospitalizations - I been hospitalized and been in residential more than 20 times.

When I was 7, my mother and I knew something was wrong. I was having trouble in school because I was seeing and hearing things but did not understand that it was different or not real. My teachers did not know about my illness. My first encounter with the police as a child with a mental illness was scary and traumatic.

One afternoon, I was running through the hallways at school looking for my older brother because my teacher was telling me to get into the closet (well that is what I heard) and I heard people laughing at me. The security guard who grabbed and questioned me made me feel overwhelmed because touching me is a major trigger and his voice was blending in with the other voices I was hearing. I did what my 7 year old paranoid self thought was necessary. I focused on finding my brother for help and getting away from the guard. SO... I hit him to protecting myself.

The guard took me to the nurse's office and the school called the police. When the police arrived, they did not introduce themselves. They acted aggressively, and shackled me to the chair and handcuffed my hands - without even asking me what was wrong. I was screaming, crying, and yelling for them to stop touching me and yelling at me. They treated me like a criminal - they handcuffed me, pulled me, and threw me in the back of the police car. They continued to scold me for what they called: being a "bad seed." I still think being a Black kid led to that comment. The school notified my mother and like always came to my rescue, and still does. She told them about some of the issues I had. In her stern motherly voice she told them how they shouldn't jump to conclusions not just with her kid but with any kid.

I have had other experiences since then, some bad and some good. To this day I still get anxious around people in any uniform. I have a few things I would like police and others to keep in mind.

- Most importantly - **no touching** whenever possible, this can make things worse
- Please keep your hands off your gun or taser – it is like threatening us. **We are already paranoid!**
- **Turn off your sirens and lights** it is confusing and frightening and triggers us –
- **Take off your sunglasses** – we need to see your face – it can be hard enough reading body language and social cues – sunglasses make it even worse

- Introduce yourself as a regular person by using your first name not by saying “Officer Jones.” It helps us feel safer and you seem friendlier
- **Talk to us like we are people** – no need to yell or be stern. We are sick at the time and **we need help not discipline.**

Similar to what Sheriff Peter said - I do think they should have options besides hospitals and jail for people who are just having a mental health crisis. We need to institute a center where police can bring people who are in crisis. So they can be evaluated by a psychiatric professional and get the necessary help they need.

Finally, when it comes to children, make sure the parents or guardians are involved. Talk to the child if possible. Understand that they could have a mental illness and not assume every kid, especially if they are Black, who acts out is a “bad seed.” Most of us are nice kids who are just having a hard time and think we are protecting ourselves from danger. We do not want to hurt people.

Thank you for listening. And thank you for coming to NAMI Advocacy Day.

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