

Richards: "Treatment builds more than just productive citizens. It strengthens families and in turn, our nation."

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NAADAC President Robert Richards released the following statement on behalf of NAADAC in response to the Newtown mass killing.

Dear Mr. President, Mr. Speaker and Members of Congress:

As the President of NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals and Executive Director of Willamette Family Inc., (a large nonprofit behavioral health care agency in Eugene, Oregon), I feel compelled to write this letter to speak to the issues of addiction and co-occurring mental health and addiction diseases.

I trust that your will is to begin to put this country on the road to recovery from the violence we have been experiencing. Following the recent tragedies in Connecticut (and more closely here in Oregon) our nation has been crying out "Why" are so grievous and horrific events occurring on a more regular basis? Those of us here in Eugene have gone through a tragedy such as this before. You may remember the Thurston High School incident where after killing his parents, Kip Kinkle drove to school, killed two students and wounded 25 others.

We grieve for the innocents murdered in Newtown, Colorado, Arizona and others just as we did in Eugene/Springfield. These are our children, our neighbors, our families, our friends. There can be no greater tragedy in a society than losing its young, its own future, so needlessly and so senselessly. Such actions strike at the very heart of who we are and who we hope to become.

For us in the behavioral health field, the answer is simpler than one might think. Yes, I do personally believe that our nation needs stronger laws concerning firearms. We also need more law enforcement on the streets but there is something we need even more.

Mr. President, I have worked in treating individuals with mental health and addictive disorders for nearly thirty years. During that time I have seen the need for these services increase dramatically, more individuals and families in the brink of substance use and mental health disorders. At the same time I have seen funding for the treatment of these disorders continually decrease. Many fine treatment programs could not sustain the funding cuts and are no longer operating, leaving the majority of us continuing to provide treatment with long waiting lists. We know from the research that if a client has to wait more than a week to receive a call to come in for services, the likelihood of the person agreeing to come is dismal.

Mr. President, treatment builds more than just productive citizens. It strengthens families and in turn, our nation. Will adequate treatment eliminate such terrible tragedies? Probably not fully, we can only pray. I do know however that most individuals who commit such violent acts suffer from mental health and/or addictive disorders and had they adequate access to treatment for those disorders their violent acts may have been prevented.

Please look very seriously at the inadequate funding levels for mental health and addiction disorders. Please make the changes necessary to provide resources for more addiction and mental health professionals, funding for services and access to treatment. We suffer a workforce shortage for those professionals who specialize in addiction services, and there is little help on the way.

With the Affordable Care Act building up to implementation, we expect over 21 million more people will seek access to treatment. Those numbers will only increase in 2014 if we do not have treatment programs for them to access and more trained professionals within those programs. Could not HRSA and SAMHSA put more emphasis on building the addiction specific workforce, increasing the education opportunities for those currently in workforce who lack advanced degrees?

[I have included a proposal that the NAADAC Executive Director has written and presented to both SAMHSA and HRSA on several occasions that outlines a strategy to accomplish this goal](#)

. Help us help heal our nation. I do not ask for myself. I ask for the thousands of addiction and mental health workers across the country that can and want to help.

Please advise me as to how NAADAC or my agency can assist you in any way, and I will consider it a great honor to do so. We are eager to help individuals, families and communities recover.

Respectfully,

[Bob Richards, MA, CADC III, NCAC II](#)

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[Statement issued by Leon Rodriguez from the Department of Health and Human on HIPPA and provider responsibility](#)