

Ms. Shauntia White
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Thank you, Chairman Elijah Cummings (MD-4), Members of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, and also for this privilege to speak about the life of my loved one who died from drug-related causes and the negative impact on family life across decades.

Schizophrenic, African American, poor, and her disease was an addiction, Terri Lynn White lived an insensible life in the shadows of democracy, where inmates of mental health issues have stood in darkness for decades in this country, without treatment.

She was as young as 16 years of age when she first began injecting cocaine. Once begun, for 20 years, she was in and out of different jails and in criminal psychiatric wards in hospitals across the DC-Baltimore Metropolitan area, unable to afford bail.

Charged with a litany of crimes, from trespassing to domestic battery to disobeying and assaulting multiple police officers to petty thief to prostitution, to drug possession, her life and the life of her children were forfeited more so because of criminalization than her addiction alone. Each of us became a ward of the State, and in many ways, was at the mercy of two broken systems — my family or social services.

Fast forward to the hours before her passing, she only had \$100 in her pocket but had ventured off into DC and later overdosed on heroin after years of sobriety from crack cocaine. She died on arrival only surviving by the breathing tube which supplied her last breath. It was shortly after the doctors announced her depleting condition the decision was left in my hands to end her life, so I did.

In the last decade, I've witnessed the impact of substance use disorder has on the black community, and the perception of being an addict in urban America is all but an illusion to those suffering and their families. Most people have no idea what is going on. Still, we all posture ourselves on issues that only tells part of the story. The part being told is treatment could not meet the increasing demand for drugs across America, but the part that is untold is it is a treatment issue in rural America, but a criminal issue in urban America.

The fundamental issue here is that we have to change the culture of systems in this beautiful democracy of ours. In cities like the District of Columbia, the unfortunate reality behind incarcerating people with substance abuse disorder is children suffer.

The worst part of it all is we continue to lose entire generations to drugs, yet we continue to arrest and

punish the poor, mostly black, for drug-related crimes, instead of providing access to recovery programs, resources, and supports to keep families intact. This was a very critical oversight by the federal government in the last drug epidemic because no one showed up for the upward of 567,000 child casualties foster care in 1999.

What Chairman Elijah Cummings and Senator Elizabeth Warren are doing now through the CARE Act proposal is vital to provide positive short- and long-term outcomes for the individual as well as society. Far too little investment is made in funding strategies that improve the treatment for substance abuse and co-occurring mental disorders, like family residential substance abuse treatment, drug addiction services, family therapy, cognitive- behavioral therapy, and case management.

In addition to these efforts, the full extent to which we can solve this drug crisis is when we address equitable policies that restore addiction treatment funds, combat racial policing practices, raise minimum wage for low-income communities, protect the family as the basic institution of society, and reinvest in the profession of social work as the backbone and heart of our nation's most vulnerable communities.