



Mental Health and Recovery Services Board

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PRESS RELEASE

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The Seven Home Years

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It is obvious to people who meet me or to those who talk on the phone with me that I have an accent and that I am "not from here." While I am now a proud U.S. citizen, I can't change where I came from. I am not writing this letter to the editor to discuss the immigration debate at the federal level, even if I, too, have an opinion about it.

In my native country of Romania, we have a saying when a child doesn't behave well or we believe that the child doesn't have the appropriate manners. We say "this child didn't have his first seven home years." In the Romanian culture, we believe the number one reflection on the child's future, their success in life, their manners, and their behavior has to do with how the child is raised during the first seven years of their life. We also acknowledge that if parents miss the opportunity of raising the children in an appropriate way during those first several years, there will likely be consequences. The child is more likely to not do well in school and be involved in the criminal justice system.

I am saying these things because for the past few days, I have thought about a response to the Florida school shooting. Do we have an immediate answer to prevent these things from happening again? No. I do, however, think we can make some system changes to reduce the likelihood of these tragedies from happening. Some examples include: improving access to early identification of mental health issues among children, improving trauma-based care services for children, improving access to mental health inpatient treatment services for children, integrating mental-health screening for all children as part of overall health check-ups, and improving support and education for families dealing with children who have a serious mental illness. But, I think that these changes will work only as a bandage and will not produce the long-term results we are all searching for. In my opinion, the solution to avoid these tragedies can take generations. In my opinion, the discussion has to start with adequate parenting. Support services need to be in place to help the children or to help a parent, but support services cannot replace adequate parenting. What concerns me is the absence of love, the lack of family structure and education in the home and the absence of pride in raising a child. What are we teaching the next generation? Unless we change as a whole and care more about our children as parents and not as a system, we will struggle for the years to come.

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