

Once a country idolized for self-determination, wealth, and free enterprise, America has become a country defined by its disillusionment, gun violence, and ability to blame acts of violence on mental illness. Mental health has become a widely discredited area of practice, from public figures denouncing mental illness as an unrealistic health concern, to making budgetary cutbacks in areas where mental healthcare is excluded. In Florida, the healthcare system is falling into disrepair in time with the rest of the country; if the act to expand affordable health care for low-income individuals is overlooked, then over 400,000 people will be without services such as medical care, mental health care, and prescription medications.

There have been 307 mass shootings in the United States in 2018 alone. Many elected officials and members of law enforcement attempt to rationalize these acts of violence with the same, tired explanation: ‘the individual(s) was mentally ill’ or ‘they were a loner, there was no way to know they would snap.’ If we dissect the first half of that statement, ‘the individual(s) was mentally ill’, we would find that since the Pulse Night Club shooting in 2016, there have been 51 mass shootings in Florida. Take a guess what the leading causes behind the shootings were? I hope you said: home-grown terrorism, racially driven motive, and yes, mental illness.

Florida should pride itself in knowing that we are the number one vacation capital in the United States and that we serve pretty darn good ice cream, but what we are known for is the ugly scar of gun violence and the ever elusive ‘Florida Man’ who makes the headlines for doing something foolish. Would it be in Florida’s best interest to ignore the need for mental health services? No. In the article written by Katie Parsons on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, she highlights the point that holistic mental-health treatments can help individuals seeking services.

As a soon-to-be social worker, I am advocating for funding to be provided to health care services. Not just for medication to be administered to clients, but for the person who is being treated holistically. The holistic model of social work shows that by treating the person in their environment is the best practice.

Dear reader, I am only 22 and by no standard an expert in mental health, but I know unfairness when I see it. If you are a person who believes mental health is what leads to mass shootings and other acts of violence, ask yourself whether it is beneficial to defund programs which provide mental health services. Consider your safety, as well as the safety of others, when you vote for officials who place the blame on a marginalized population.

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## References

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