



STATEMENT ON RECENT PRESS AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE ABOUT THE MENTAL HEALTH STATUS OF PUBLIC FIGURES

Over the last few weeks, an increasing number of people from all points on the political spectrum have started to discuss, most often in a disparaging way, President Trump's mental health. The press and the public alike have thrown around words like "unhinged," "crazy," and "unstable." Behind these provocative words lies the all too common assumption that a person who has a mental health disability cannot possibly be trusted, let alone successful. Unfortunately, this assumption seems prevalent even among psychiatrists who should professionally be most aware of this falsehood.

The Bazelon Center has spent the past four decades fighting back against the discrimination implicit in such rhetoric. Having a mental health disability does not mean that a person is "bad," "dangerous," or "unhinged." And calling the President "mentally ill" in order to insult or undermine him causes actual harm to people with mental health disabilities. The false assumption that a person with a mental health disability is unfit has caused many people to be denied jobs, lose housing, or have children removed from their custody, regardless of their capabilities as an employee, a tenant, or a parent. This type of discrimination has also led many people to avoid seeking needed help, out of fear they will lose a job, be denied a license, or otherwise be treated unfairly based on the need for treatment, or even a diagnosis alone.

The existence of a mental health diagnosis or disability tells us nothing about an individual's behavior, qualifications, or competence. Some of those eager to diagnose the President have cited concerns about his "verbal aggressiveness, boasting about sexual assaults, inciting violence in others and the continual taunting of a hostile nation with nuclear weapons." While concerns about such conduct may be fairly raised, it is the conduct itself, not a mental health diagnosis, which is relevant. Claiming a person must be mentally ill – or "crazy" – to exhibit these behaviors is factually incorrect and blatantly discriminatory. Millions of Americans with mental health disabilities live, work, and raise families while not demonstrating any of these behaviors and this rhetoric does nothing but hurt them. We must do better.