

## A 911 call for mental health reform



Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton accompanied by running mate Tim Kaine, left, speaks at a rally at Florida International University Panther Arena in Miami, Saturday, July 23, 2016.



By **Guest Voices**

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**By Jean Lufkin Boulter**, a former reporter with *The Birmingham News* and author of *"Chasing the Mockingbird – A Memoir of a Broken Mind."*

The fog of madness creeps in on little cat feet. But unlike the fog in Carl Sandburg's poem it does not move on. The mist leaves behind silent slayers -- depression that has no floor or mania that has no ceiling. Delusions can quietly take over every thought.

One in five Americans suffer from mental illness, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. That's more than 40 million people. An estimated 17 million children have some form of mental health problems, as do 1 in 5 college students and 1 in 5 veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Alabama is not alone in trying to deal with the problem of how to treat them. The issue, long a taboo subject, is gaining attention in the state and in the nation. AL.com launched a multi-part series and this week Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton announced a multi-stage plan for action.

Clinton has long tried to include mental conditions on an equal insurance footing with physical illness. And the federal government has taken many steps in that direction. But there remains a gap between treating the mind and other organs, such as the heart, though both require much care.

Included in Clinton's proposal are many issues facing Alabama, such as:

- Early diagnosis and intervention.
- Enforcement of parity laws that put mental health on an equal footing with physical health.
- Training for law enforcement officers who face confrontations with the mentally ill.
- Making treatment a priority over jail by utilizing Medicare and Medicaid to provide a team of a primary doctor, care manager and mental health specialist.
- More funding for community health centers.
- Invest in brain and behavioral research and develop safe and effective treatments.

Clinton did not say how the plan would be funded. But even so, she said that in her first year in office she would convene a White House conference on mental illness.

Making the issue a national priority would be a giant step, no matter what your politics may be.

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