



August 2021

Dear Simone, Sha'Carri, and Naomi,

Thank you for being honest and brave in talking about your mental health. You are amazing women, strong in both mind and body. Sharing your stories has helped shift the conversation around mental health, shedding light on the many ways our brains can betray our bodies. And your focus on doing what is right for you, practicing the kind of self-care that you each need, has set a great example for others.

I wish that people did not have to be brave to talk about their mental health. If we were talking about a physical injury, like a broken ankle, no one would say we had to be brave. But we separate the brain from the body, adding to the shame and stigma associated with mental health conditions.

Among those considered the bravest in talking about mental health are pregnant women and new mothers who experience anxiety or depression. Society paints pregnancy and new motherhood with images of glowing mothers holding their bountiful bellies or beautiful babies.

In reality, anxiety and depression are the most common complications of pregnancy and childbirth.

Here are the facts:

- Anxiety and depression impact 1 in 5 women or childbearing people, or 800,000 new parents each year in the United States.
- Women facing economic or racial inequities are more likely to experience maternal mental health conditions and less likely to get help.
- Tragically, 75% of those affected remain untreated, leading to potential long-term negative impact on mother, baby, family, and society.
- Suicide and overdose combined are the leading cause of death for women in the first year following pregnancy.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has fueled a three-fold increase in the number of pregnant women reporting anxiety and depression.

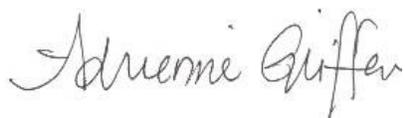
New mothers experiencing anxiety and depression are not weak. They bravely push through for the sake of their child and family. They deserve to be educated about and routinely screened for maternal mental health conditions. They should not have to ask for help; it should be offered:

- Healthcare providers should educate childbearing women about mental health conditions and screen for them routinely during pregnancy and the first year postpartum.
- Women experiencing mental health conditions should feel comfortable talking about these issues without fear of being considered a “bad mom”.
- Federal funding should support resources at both the national level (including a new maternal mental health hotline and support for Postpartum Support International) as well as the state and local levels (with grants to states and communities to create programs and services).

Simone, Sha’Carri, and Naomi, you have made great strides in raising awareness about mental health conditions. I hope that you will continue to talk about how you are doing and how taking time to care for yourself improves your mental health.

Most of all, I hope that if and when you have children that MMHLA will have achieved our vision of a nation that prioritizes the mental health of new mothers so that you will not have to be brave when talking about your mental health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Adrienne Griffen".

Adrienne Griffen  
Executive Director  
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance