

## AMY MCKIERNAN—An Invitation

In our previous publications as the Revolutionizing and Rethinking Domestic Violence Subcommittee, we insisted that those who seek to end domestic violence must radically improve mental health care services in this country. If we hope to **break** rather than simply **relocate** cycles of violence, we must actively resist the criminalization of mental illness while we actively promote mental health care access and reform. To this end, our pamphlet serves as an invitation.

We welcome you to collaborate with us as we work to dismantle the systems and practices that make prison inevitable for those who do not have access to mental health care, therapeutic interventions, and community-based healing.

In their recent article for the *American Journal of Public Health*, Vanderbilt faculty Jonathan M. MetzI, (MD, PhD) and Kenneth T. MacLeish, (PhD) challenge the assumption that we ought to blame gun violence and mass shootings on the mentally ill. Instead of focusing on single shooters, MetzI and MacLeish encourage psychiatric practitioners to expand their scope and collaborate with communities to better understand a culture that so quickly links safety and strength with violence: "Perhaps psychiatric expertise might be put to better use by enhancing U.S. discourse about the complex anxieties, social and economic formations, and blind assumptions that make people fear each other in the first place. Psychiatry could help society interrogate what guns mean to everyday people, and why people feel they need guns or reject guns out of hand. By addressing gun discord as symptomatic of deeper concerns, psychiatry could, ideally, promote more meaningful public conversations on the impact of guns on civic life. And it could join with public health researchers, community activists, law enforcement officers, or business leaders to identify and address the underlying structural and infrastructural issues that foster real or imagined notions of mortal fear." ("Mental Illness, Mass Shootings, and the Politics of American Firearms" published by the *American Journal of Public Health* in February 2015, Vol 105, No. 2.)

MetzI and MacLeish articulate a vision that we support. We seek to better understand and heal cycles of fear and violence (in homes, in neighborhoods, in the penal system, and in nations) without making it a crime to experience mental illness. Although we recognize the value of therapeutic intervention on the individual level, we find it deplorable that access to this service is predominantly determined by wealth. We suggest a collaboration that includes all of OUR unique perspectives without assuming that the disenfranchised, despaired, and impaired must have health insurance, money, or political standing to weigh in on the future of mental health care in our communities and country.



### INSIDERS

Abu Ali, the Episcopalian  
Ty. C.  
Akil Jahi

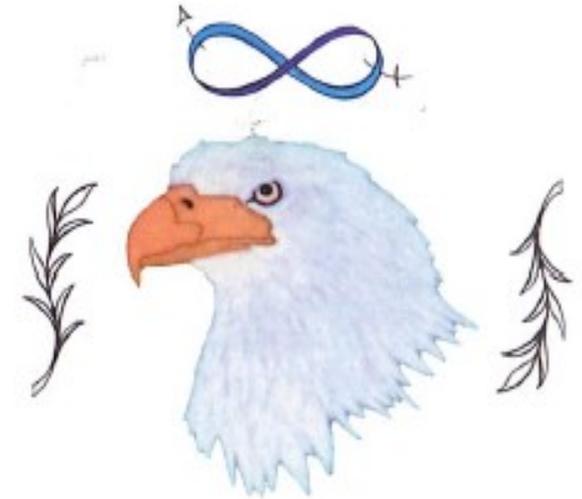
### OUTSIDERS

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## |RE|VOLUTIONIZING

And Rethinking Domestic Violence



"Give them back their hope,  
then they will listen." | Abu Ali |

## ABOUT OUR IMAGES:

The symbols were created by Abu Ali and Ty. C. The Eagle is a pastel piece done by Abu Ali which, according to his and the spiritual belief, represents Illumination of the Spirit, Healing, and Creation. In early Christian mysticism, the eagle was a symbol of resurrection. The olive branches serve as an invitation to conciliation. The 16 leaves on the branch stand for Tennessee as the 16th state in the union and remind us that we must start from local places and relationships. The male and female signs represent the need to reanalyze domestic violence in this Nation. We must honor the experiences of all beings and be mindful of race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, and ability. We take an intersectional approach, also symbolized by the colors for domestic violence awareness (purple) and sexual assault awareness (teal) coming together in the symbol for infinity—as we hope to offer a model that others can consider and adjust to meet the needs of their own communities.

## ABU ALI—Healing Hidden Wounds

*“The current justice system does not meet the needs of people who have experienced trauma. Incarceration itself can be traumatic.”* – Abu Ali, The Episcopalian

Through experience, I have found, although each state provides some form of evidence based treatment for people with mental illness, and emotional uncultivation, their scope is often limited and they do not always include culturally competent or trauma-informed services. Their expansion remains limited by budget constraints. There are no programs providing treatment to uninsured people who have experienced mental, and physical harm; aimed to impact PTSD, depression, and behavioral outcomes.

The correctional facility's staff insensitivity, seclusion, or loss of privacy, can exacerbate negative feelings created by previous victimization. Correctional facilities are frequently exposed to verbal and physical aggression which will intensify fear or traumatic symptoms.

People who experience trauma as children will develop life-long psychiatric conditions, including personality disorders, conduct disorders, depression, anxiety, substance abuse disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). My studies have shown that a majority of people with these histories experienced school problems, school dropout and expulsion rates were three times as high as their peers who had not experienced trauma. I've also discovered this particular group of people are continuously being set up for failure and their psychological and emotional disorders are being incriminated. In my view, this is a disguise of discrimination.

I appeal to the Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for people who have experienced trauma, their families, and communities throughout the United States. Doing your own research, you will find that the biological, psychological, and social development of individuals who have experienced trauma are often derailed, resulting in increased involvement with the penal system where development and rehabilitative needs are not met. The experts in medicine, therapeutic psychology, social work, and policy scholars need to advocate for a 21st century reform that will address the unique needs of people who have experienced and continue to experience traumatic events. It is obvious that long term strategies to treat rather than just rely on retribution are needed to curb the cycle of criminal justice involvement at its source and that these programs should be supported at the state and federal levels.

The United States has been plagued with traumatic events for a couple of hundred years. This subject matter now has become a pressing public health concern. A traumatic event can involve interpersonal events such as physical or sexual abuse, community violence, family violence, neglect, maltreatment, witnessing violence or experiencing trauma vicariously.

I know for a fact that people who experience childhood trauma are more likely to be arrested for serious crimes both as youth and adults. Many of our country's most traumatized youth are found in gangs and the juvenile justice system. A large percentage of adults in the criminal justice system report having experienced trauma in childhood. Leaving many of these people without services and treatment they need violates the 8th amendment—the cruel and unusual punishment clause.

When I was eight years old, the man appointed by GOD to be my father hog tied me, threw me in a closet, tied a wet thin piece of leather around the head of my penis; the other end was tied to the clothing hook above my head and I was left there in the dark for hours. Here I now sit. I was one of the ones left behind to drown in bitterness and hate. Had I had assistance and treatment, I could have helped myself. Did you know the part of the brain responsible for rational decision-making does not fully develop until the mid-20's and that the most critical brain development occurs in early childhood?

I am Abu Ali, the Episcopalian, a survivor, living to contribute to the welfare of the people who do not know, as of yet, how to express themselves. Thank you for your attention.

**“I honor the place in you, which is the same in me.  
I acknowledge, we are all one.”**



## AKIL JAHI—Police Leaders Send a Message on Prison Reform

Some law enforcement heads, including Memphis Police Director Toney Armstrong, have said for years that it is unrealistic for municipal officials to think they can arrest their way out of serious crime problems. That message tends to get drowned out by politicians pushing tough-on-crime platforms and by citizens who are deluged with news reports about violent crime and expect police to be tough on criminals.

Violent criminals need to be taken off the streets, but law enforcement leaders across the nation, as a group, are speaking up, calling for an end to “mass incarceration” while maintaining public safety. The officials have formed the Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime and Incarceration, with an agenda to “push reforms to reduce prison sentences and alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders.” Armstrong and the chiefs of Nashville and Chattanooga police departments are listed as members of the organization, as well as individuals who lead or have led law enforcement agencies or associations, and current and former prosecutors at the local, state, and federal levels of government.

Since 2002, the United States has had the highest incarceration rate in the world. While prison populations are increasing in parts of the world, the normal rate of incarceration for nations corresponding to the United States tends to hover around 100 prisoners per 100,000 population. The U.S. rate is 500 prisoners per 100,000 residents, or about 1.6 million prisoners in 2010, according to data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics. That number dropped slightly in 2014, corresponding with initiatives by state and the federal government to reduce the number of nonviolent prisoners being sent to prison.

While suppression can be effective in getting criminals, especially violent offenders off the street, there are always two or three more to replace them. That makes it imperative that all of the stakeholders in the war on crime find effective ways to attack the problem at its roots. That means developing better intervention strategies to keep children from growing up to become criminals. Officials are realizing that mass incarceration is gobbling up increasingly scarce government financial resources. Some may feel the expenditure is worth it. That may be true for keeping the worst of the worst behind bars. Is this a good investment, though, for nonviolent offenders when there are alternatives such as probation, public service and electronic monitoring?

“It's pretty clear what we have been doing isn't working,” Christopher Slobagin, director of Vanderbilt Law School's Criminal Justice Program said during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing in Nashville! Let's listen to him.