



## **Okay to Say™ Recognizes State Rep. Garnet Coleman's Efforts for Raising Awareness Around Mental Health Issues with Leadership Award**

**Dallas, Nov. 5, 2016** – [Okay to Say™](#), a community-based awareness campaign committed to expanding the conversation around mental health issues, recognized Texas State Representative Garnet Coleman with the inaugural Okay to Say Leadership Award for his dedication and tireless efforts in furthering the conversation of mental health in Texas.

Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, which developed the Okay to Say campaign, has worked with Coleman in the effort to lead discussion surrounding mental health for Texans and recognized him for his ongoing leadership within his community and the state.

"We extend our appreciation to Chairman Coleman for his decades of leadership, Texas would not have made the gains it has without his tireless work," said Dr. Andy Keller, president and CEO of Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. "Chairman Coleman's commitment to improving behavioral health in our state sets a great example for other influential leaders of the impact they can have in their communities by encouraging open conversation."

"Thank you for presenting me with the Okay to Say Leadership Award," said Rep. Coleman. "Ensuring that all Texans have access to affordable mental health treatment has been one of my top priorities during my 25 years in the legislature."

His involvement in mental health issues spans over the course of his political career, touching on all aspects such as crisis intervention training, mental health courts and suicide prevention. In 1997 Coleman authored a partial mental health parity law that required most Texas insurance plans to offer coverage for serious mental disorders. Until the passage of the Affordable Care Act, this law was stronger than relevant federal laws, making Texas a leader on the issue. Another notable contribution from Coleman was his work last session to alleviate the problem of insufficient availability of mental health professionals in the state by providing supervising psychologists the ability to bill insurance companies for the services provided by pre-doctoral interns. This enables psychologists to hire more interns, directly increasing the number of qualified mental health professionals in the state. Since most newly-licensed psychologists choose to practice near the area where they intern, increasing the number of internships available in Texas will encourage more graduates to practice here and help our state meet the high demand for care.

Coleman's work surrounding mental health has been so notable that he was also asked to join the House Select Committee on Mental Health. The committee's primary responsibility is to work during the months leading up to the 2017 session of the Texas Legislature and take a comprehensive look at the behavioral health system, including substance abuse treatment, and then make substantial recommendations to improve early diagnosis of mental illness and increase collaboration among those providing care.

Coleman has pledged to continue his work come January 2017. He added, "Mental Health will continue to be one of my top priorities next session. I will look to pass policies that fix mental health workforce inadequacies, decrease the stigma of mental health, and remove barriers to accessing mental health treatment."



The Houston-area congressman is the first to receive this award, which was presented to him Wednesday, November 2, in Austin.

**About Okay to Say™**

Okay to Say™ is a community-based campaign launched by the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute and its partners to increase public awareness that most mental illnesses are treatable and to offer a message of hope and recovery to Texans and their families. The goal of Okay to Say is to change the conversation and perceptions around mental illness, which ultimately can lead to: growing understanding, advocacy and support for those with mental illness; improving access to community services for diagnosis and treatment; and accelerating progress in the quality and delivery of mental health care. The statewide effort has received support from George P. Bush, Mark Cuban, Emmitt Smith and hundreds of other Texans. To learn more and to join the Okay to Say movement, visit [okaytosay.org](http://okaytosay.org).

**About the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute**

The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute is a nonpartisan organization that supports the implementation of policies and programs to help Texans obtain effective, efficient mental health care when and where they need. For more information about the Institute, please visit [texasstateofmind.org](http://texasstateofmind.org).

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