

*City of Taunton  
Office of the Mayor*



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Contact: Radka Barter  
508-821-1000

**O’Connell Announces Launch of Make It OK Campaign  
To Promote Mental Health Awareness and Acceptance**

Taunton, MA... Mayor Shaunna O’Connell announced the launch of the City of Taunton’s Make It OK campaign, an initiative promoting mental health awareness and acceptance. May is National Mental Health Awareness Month.

Mayor O’Connell’s UNITE team, in conjunction with several community partners, is focusing a spotlight on mental health issues. “Our goal is to implement initiatives this month which will carry forward into the future and help us maintain a focus on the importance of mental health and the need for widespread access to resources,” O’Connell said.

The Make It OK campaign created by Health Partners, Inc. is designed to reduce the stigma of mental illnesses and seeks to encourage open conversations and education surrounding many prevalent misperceptions. The Make It OK website encourages individuals and organizations to take a pledge to commit to changing hearts and minds about mental illnesses and “...spread the word, stop the silence and Make it OK.”

O’Connell invited members of the community and mental health advocates to this week’s City Council meeting to launch Taunton’s own Make It OK campaign. The focus of this campaign will be on increasing awareness and acceptance of mental health conditions and promoting the need for greater access to mental health resources.

O’Connell began the Make It OK presentation by enumerating the statistics associated with mental health conditions and called upon residents to remember the message of acceptance evoked by Violet Grigorias, a 9-year-old Taunton resident, whom O’Connell invited to speak at a City Council meeting during Autism Acceptance Month. Tanya Lobo, of UNITE and True Diversity, talked about the need to ensure access to at-risk individuals and emphasized the importance of reaching out to all communities. Lobo said, “We will include all communities, with a focus on families, youth, veterans, marginalized, and BIPOC communities.”

Several speakers described the challenges and stigma associated with mental health conditions. Derek Heim of the Boys & Girls Club shared the uplifting story of a youth who was able to access resources and overcome challenges; Steve Turner of the Taunton Police Department spoke of the outreach efforts made to assist both first responders and members of the community; and Erin Kelley-Green of

the YMCA's Family Resource Center spoke openly about her experience, both personal and professional, with domestic violence and the effects of trauma.

Charlene Bonenfant of the Taunton Department of Human Services wrapped up the Make It OK presentation by urging compassion and understanding while explaining the often-debilitating effects of mental health conditions. Bonenfant ended her remarks with a call for action, "I challenge you to be accepting of the emotions, whether yours or someone else's. I challenge you to stop for a minute and listen, whether to yourself or someone else. I challenge you to engage in self-care and seek help if needed. Because it is ok – and together we can make it ok."

The Make It OK campaign will be wide-ranging and will include many local organizations. Residents can expect to see a full-scale effort involving social media, public service announcements, educational opportunities, and more. "We will engage with the community and we will combine our efforts to Make It OK to talk about mental health; Make It OK to have a mental health condition; and Make It OK to ask for help," said O'Connell.

For updates on the Make it Ok campaign, please check the City of Taunton website ([taunton-ma.gov](http://taunton-ma.gov)) and Facebook page regularly.

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