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ALLSTON BRIGHTON

AG Martha Coakley to headline 10th annual NAMIWalks 5k in Brighton to support mental health

Posted by Matt Rocheleau May 8, 2013 05:40 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

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Attorney General Martha Coakley will be the keynote speaker this weekend at the 10th annual NAMIWalks Massachusetts, which draws several thousand people each year to raise money and to challenge stigmas and stereotypes associated with mental illness.

The 5k walk hosted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Massachusetts, and named after the organization's acronym, begins at 11 a.m. Saturday at Artesani Park along Soldiers Field Road in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston. Check-in starts at 9 a.m., followed by programming at 10:15 a.m.

Coakley, whose brother suffered from bipolar disorder and committed suicide in 1996, is scheduled to speak at the event and will participate in the walk.

"I am proud to be involved in this year's NAMI walk," she said in a statement. "NAMI serves a critical role by improving the public's awareness and understanding of mental illnesses, providing support, and helping ensure that all affected by mental illness receive the critical services they deserve."

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In recent years, Coakley's office has cracked down on health insurance companies that fail to provide state-required coverage for mental health and related services. And, in [a letter this month](#), Coakley said her office will continue to closely monitor insurance providers to make sure they comply with the law.

"Failure to provide coverage of important mandated mental health benefits has a severe and detrimental impact on individuals who need those services, their families, and even their communities," Coakley wrote.

Former Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis and his wife, Katharine "Kitty" Dukakis, who has struggled with depression and addiction and is a board member of NAMI Mass, also plan to partake in the walk.

"We want to walk because we support everything that NAMI does in Massachusetts and feel very grateful that we have an organization that is of such high quality," said a statement from Kitty Dukakis.

"This is a biological illness. Rich families, poor families, middle class families are all affected by this," said a statement from Michael Dukakis. "NAMI is one of those groups that's out there working hard for these folks.

"The important thing is for people to understand that they're not alone, that a lot of folks including the Kitty Dukakises of this world have had the same problem and, in the vast majority of cases, it's treatable," he added. "And people can live good and solid and productive lives if they get the help they need."

One in 4 adults in the US, or nearly 60 million people, experience a mental health disorder each year, according to the [National Institute of Mental Health](#). About 6 percent of people nationwide live with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, major depression or bipolar disorder.

NAMI Mass has raised \$3 million through its annual walk since the event was first held a decade ago. The money has gone directly into programs and services, the organization said.

Last year's race drew more than 7,000 participants raised more than \$520,000, which made it the most successful NAMIWalks fundraiser in the country for the third consecutive year and the first to break the half-million dollar mark. The money raised during the 2012 walk accounted for more than half of the

organization's annual budget.

Organizers hope Saturday's walk, with help from more than 70 corporate sponsors, will raise \$600,000.

"The walk is a stigma-free zone, a celebration of dignity, hope, recovery and resiliency," said a statement from Laurie Martinelli, director of NAMI Mass, which was founded in 1982 and now had 20 local chapters and more than 2,500 members.

"One in four adults will experience a mental health disorder this year in the U.S. and tragically, largely because of stigma, most will go untreated," added Martinelli. "The walk proves that recovery is real and that people with mental illness can and do lead fruitful and productive lives."

Participants can register before the race, and walk-ins are also welcome.

To register, create a fundraising page or donate to others, visit www.namiwalks.org, click "Find a Walk," and select the Massachusetts "Walksite." New NAMIWalks smartphone apps, which allow walkers to manage fundraising efforts, are also available to download via some mobile devices.

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