

Dear Representative Homan,

Eleven years ago, I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. Like many who suffer with the diagnosis, I too fought the notion that I needed medication. In the past year, I've been proven wrong on so many levels and I would like to share my experience with you.

Last year, I took a job with a temporary agency for one of the largest insurance companies in the state of Florida. When I interviewed for the position, I was led to believe that the position could become permanent, if I were the right person for the job. I started my new position with the hope of really turning my career around and for awhile I succeeded, until I had a depressive episode. The past came back to haunt me.

For years, I had been a stellar employee—when I actually showed up to work. If polled, my past employers would probably reference me as such: 'She's very smart, productive, and gets along with everyone, but, her attendance record, well...' The fact of the matter is that without medication, my depressive episodes render me virtually incapacitated to perform even the simplest task and on more occasions than I care to divulge, suicidal. As an employee, you can't call your boss and say "Hey, I won't be in today, I feel like dying," therefore, creating a vicious cycle of excessive absenteeism and more fake illnesses than one can imagine. Needless to say, the anxiety of returning to work (if I was able to keep my job) created *more* anxiety and stress, only exacerbating my illness. Incidentally, I'm a resourceful person and know my rights under the American's with Disabilities Act and disclosing my illness with my employer, seemed like a logical approach to the issue. Without going into too much detail, I will tell you that in my efforts to make a 'fresh start,' I disclosed my illness to my employer and was treated like the resident loon. Back to square one.

I realized that I needed to take responsibility for my well being and when I took my current position, sought the help that was long overdue. My dilemma? As a temporary employee of the insurance company, I am not entitled to benefits of any kind. I visited my local mental health agency and because I work, I qualified for the *sliding scale rate* of \$200.00 and a four-month wait to see a physician for medication. Additionally, I have accumulated more than \$20,000 in debt to local physicians and hospitals, who all desperately want their money. As a person with Bipolar Disorder who is not taking medication, I am perpetuating a cycle of poverty, countless jobs, and legal issues. I am not alone in this boat, this, I know for certain.

Today, I am faced with an issue that affects so many Americans who are suffering as I am: I want to work and be a productive citizen and contribute to society. How can I can I do that when I seek the help I need but make too much money, but not

enough to afford the insurance from the very company I work for today. Please help me get the answer to this question before I become another statistic.

Sincerely,

(name withheld)