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## **Walk a Mile Rally Should Keep Focus on the People, Not Politics**

**LANSING, Mich. – (Sept. 16, 2025)** – On September 17, thousands of Michiganders will gather at the State Capitol for the annual Walk a Mile in My Shoes Rally. For more than two decades, this event has given people living with mental illness, substance use disorders, or intellectual and developmental disabilities, and the providers who serve them, a chance to share their stories, raise awareness, and remind lawmakers that mental health matters.

“The Walk a Mile Rally is supposed to be about the people who want their voices heard, who want to end stigma, and who want to make sure behavioral care is accessible and prioritized in every community,” said Daniel Cherrin, executive director of the [MI Care Council](#). “And the people attending the rally, who want legislators to understand what it’s like to walk a mile in their shoes, should not be used to advance a political agenda they are not there to advance.”

For 21 years, the Walk a Mile Rally has reduced stigma, educated lawmakers, and called attention to the ongoing need for behavioral health funding and services. It remains one of the most important civic demonstrations of its kind, bringing together clinicians, administrators, families, and, most importantly, the individuals who rely on Michigan’s behavioral health system every day.

As the event organizers use this year’s walk to make “anti-privatization” the core of their message, the MI Care Council is reminding lawmakers and the public that the rally’s true purpose is its focus on people. It is about building a behavioral health system that is consistent, accountable, and focused on care, one where every dollar can be traced back to services that help people live, work, and thrive in their communities.

“I support advocacy in all its forms,” Cherrin added. “But I wish this rally were not being overshadowed by fear-based messages about privatization that simply aren’t true. The State has made it clear: only nonprofits, public bodies, and universities are eligible to submit a bid. This event should be about dignity, inclusion, and awareness. The people who walk each year deserve to know that their voices are being lifted for who they are, not used as part of someone else’s fight. We believe in a system that works better for families and providers alike, and we are committed to building it together.”

“This rally should be about saying loud and clear: I belong. I have a right to be here, to work, to live, to thrive in my community. And that is exactly what the State’s redesign is working to achieve — a system that puts people before bureaucracy, delivers care efficiently and consistently across Michigan, holds funders accountable, and ensures taxpayer dollars go directly to services, not overhead. That is the message we need to lift in Lansing,” Cherrin said.

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