

Legal Issues Arise When Mentally Ill Children Become Adults

By **JAMES EDWARDS**

In just one-month, Tayquan Pomare-Taylor, of Dorchester, turns 18. His first goal is one many teenagers share: getting a drivers license. But an even bigger accomplishment for Tayquan will be adjusting to life away from home.



Tayquan with his parents, Roy and Monica Lynch, in Washington, D.C. last year.
Credit Courtesy of the Lynch Family

“During my whole life I’ve been struggling with change, so I’m trying to adjust to that,” he said.

Those struggles led doctors to diagnose Tayquan when he was 12 with ADHD, general anxiety and mood disorder – a form of depression.

"It was like one of those 'Oh' moments – like, okay. Because if I had it this whole time, them telling me that I had it really wasn't gonna change me."

For Tayquan's parents, Roy and Monica Lynch, raising a child with mental illness has brought challenges and rewards.

"He pretty much reintroduced me to parenting. So working with him, having that patience with him was very, very key. It's something I still work on today," Monica said.

That careful support has helped Tayquan thrive. As a youth leader with the Boston Children's Museum, he got the opportunity last year to meet First Lady Michelle Obama at the White House. And he's attending college in the fall. But with Tayquan on the verge of adulthood, he'll soon be responsible for managing on his own care -- something that encourages and concerns his parents.

"My fear is that my son will have a stress trigger in college and not have the support system around him and that will be the beginning of spiraling downwards," Monica said.

Tayquan's parents have already started talking to him about his medical rights as an adult – and the hope that he'll keep them involved in his treatment.

"You can always catch – hopefully catch – your loved one in a moment where they're willing to sign off on that paperwork and so I would continue to do that and just try to keep him close and just share that I love to him, I wanna support him and that we're not here to hurt the situation or to hurt him."

For parents of adult children with mental illness, the question of medical guardianship is a difficult one, said [Gary Zalkin](#), an attorney specializing in mental health law.

"I think that taking away somebody's rights and having somebody else make decisions for them, I think, is an evil. I think it's good not to do that. The tricky part being it's a greater evil not to do that," Zalkin said.

That's because Massachusetts is just [one of five states](#) that does not require some of the severely mentally ill to take their medications or face hospitalization. That's why for families such as Tayquan's, planning ahead is important, Zalkin said.

"A tricky thing is saying 'you're gonna make all the decisions' when that's not gonna happen in all situations. It is not good. It's important to be honest and sincere, but as much as possible to have the individual's wishes guide treatment."

It's a delicate balance admit Roy and Monica Lynch. At this point, Tayquan has not given them medical guardianship, but he is involving them in his treatment

decisions.

"I'm trying to make sure that he knows what supports he needs and when he knows when that spiral might start so that he can kind of stop and ask us or someone in the school where he's at," Monica said.

"That's a key thing that he'll always do: check in with home, if he's ever unsure. I can almost guarantee that will happen," Roy said.

Tayquan said he plans to major in philosophy at a community college – and it's just one of many things on his list for the future.

"My hope in life would be to have options, have choices for my life," he said. "I wanna be able to choose my life."