

PARLIAMENT OF KENYA

THE SENATE

THE HANSARD

Tuesday, 11th June, 2019

*The House met at the Senate Chamber,
Parliament Buildings, at 2.30 p.m.*

[The Speaker (Hon. Lusaka) in the Chair]

PRAYER

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

ADHERENCE TO STANDING ORDERS IN PROCESSING OF STATEMENTS

Sen. Olekina: Mr. Deputy Speaker Sir, I rise to support this Bill by Sen. Kasanga. It is an amendment to the Mental Health Act.

From the onset, I have to say that as a country, we have truly neglected people who are mentally unwell in this society. I say this being one of the victims in the sense that, when you have a person who suffers from mental health problems in your family, you also end up suffering from it by extension.

I am quite pleased with my sister for introducing an aspect where it will now become legal for this country to be able to find a way to incorporate these people who are challenged into our society.

When I was listening to Sen. Kihika, I remembered that 95 percent of all Kenyans who go to the United States of America (USA) work in the mental health sector. They feed their families through the proceeds that they get from working in mental health facilities. It begs the question as to why we should not be able to borrow that concept and ensure that we care about the well-being of our people. I think we can really learn a lot.

I was having a conversation with Sen. Kasanga who is the sponsor of this Bill. One of the areas that I was concerned with has to do with the issue of the obligations of the national Government and county governments. Health is a devolved function apart from the national referral health facilities which are in Schedule Four of the Constitution.

I was suggesting to Sen. Kasanga that in her amendments, the functions of the national Government should be limited only to the national referral health facilities which are stipulated in the Constitution. We should find a way of empowering our county governments so that they can develop mental health facilities in the counties.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is quite sad that right now, when we have anybody suffering from any mental illness, he ends up going to Mathari National Teaching and Referral Hospital, Kenyatta National Referral Hospital or a few other institutions that

offer mental care. When one goes there, they encounter a very strange environment. I remember when my dear brother was there, we had to find a way of taking him back home for him to improve because when he was there, he completely deteriorated. This is something that is quite personal. I know many people may shy away from talking about it, but we must accept it because all of us suffer from some form of mental illness.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think the entire political class is completely insane. This is because we even make decisions in this House and later on ask ourselves what we did. Sometimes we suffer mental breakdown when we pass legislation that end up affecting us.

It is imperative that we support devolution so that county governments can empower institutions in counties to provide medical care to people with mental illness. I hope that Sen. Kasanga will amend this Bill at the Committee Stage to ensure that every Government department will have a psychiatrist to help our people. If you count the number of psychiatrists we have in this country versus the number of people who suffer from mental illness, you will be shocked. I hope she will find a way to include an aspect where every institution, particularly these big corporations, will be obligated by this Act to have a department that will deal entirely with the issue of mental illness.

Sometimes we do not care about our brothers and sisters. We stopped being our brothers' keepers, especially when they are in retirement. I dare say that they start suffering some form of mental illness. As part of preparing them, a psychology department should be set up in every Government institution. That would be one of the good amendments that Sen. Kasanga can add here so that it prepares people for how to live outside government circles.

The biggest challenge we have now is that a lot of what we do tends to benefit people in urban settings. I would love to see an inclusion of rural health care facilities in this Bill. We need to have some form of support to those small hospitals in the counties. We know that health is one of the very expensive things in this country, and only the rich can get the best medical facilities and rehabilitation centres. It would, therefore, be good for us to also consider the poor people in the rural areas. There are some areas where people do not know what a hospital is. I think that was in the minds of the drafters of our Constitution when they were devolving health, so that it could go down to the village level.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, since we now have an opportunity to align this to the Constitution and to the Health Act, it will be proper for Sen. Kasanga to find a way to include a requirement that those dispensaries at home have a department that can talk to another department at the county level so that the people in the rural areas can also benefit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the statistics are quite alarming. We talk about one out of four people suffering from some form of mental illness. When I look around, we might have two or three people in this House right now who are completely insane.

The Deputy Speaker (Sen. (Prof.) Kindiki): Order, Sen. Olekina; be careful.

Sen. Olekina: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir. I am only speaking of the realities in this country, because maybe I just chewed a moment of insanity. That is the norm. That happens every day because of the challenges we go through. I can see one of my good friends maybe also thinking that what I said could be true.

To end my contribution, I fully support Sen. Kasanga in her amendments. I hope that she can also include a section that treats Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), because it is really a challenge to them. Just imagine one is already disabled, and then he or she suffers some form of mental illness. Let us help them because they are forced to go through some form of psychological trauma by the fact that they have been put into this world differently; then they go through another mental breakdown. These people are so disadvantaged.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I beg my sister to include a specific clause that focuses on PWDs of any form so that they can be taken care of by either county governments. Even when they come to the national referral centres, they should be treated with a lot of dignity. All we are asking for is that we accept the realities of this world. We need to accept people who are suffering from mental illness and support them so that they can live a normal life as we are living.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, with those few remarks, I beg to support.

(Applause)