

Help for Children

A Mother Finds Help for Her Own Child and, in the Process, Advocates for All Children

Angelica Lagos

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Look at the chart and read the definition of *bipolar disorder* on p. 25. Explain it in your own words. Why is it called “bi” + “polar”?
2. The *state capitol* is where the state congress meets to make laws (also known as *bills*). Sometimes community members give *testimony* for or against the laws. This is called *advocacy*.

Something Happened to My Daughter

I immigrated to the United States in 1999 with my oldest daughter Flor. She was three years old. She was a happy, friendly girl who loved animals. I wanted to give her a better education and more opportunities.

Flor grew up quickly. She did well in kindergarten and elementary school. But in high school, Flor started behaving strangely. I thought it was because of her age. I thought it would pass. One day while I was at work, the school counselor called me and told me my daughter was having problems. The next day, I went to my daughter's classroom and sat in the back of the room to watch. I didn't understand why my daughter couldn't stay still. She walked around the classroom and looked at everyone very anxiously. Then she told me that “they” were going to wait for her after school.

I spoke with my daughter's counselor about these threats, and I thought they would do something to keep her safe. The next day, my daughter didn't want to go to school because she knew “they” were going to hit her. She was nervous and anxious, but she went to school anyway. When class ended, two students were



A member of SKCE Equality gives testimony about how school policies impact children. Photo from <https://www.skcequality.org/program/education-advocacy/>

waiting for her, and they hit her. When the school called me at work again, I couldn't believe it. I had trusted them to keep her safe, but they let my daughter get hurt.

Finally, A Diagnosis

My daughter was feeling ill. She didn't sleep well at night and started hearing voices and seeing strange things. The next day, I took her to the emergency room. She was very ill. She didn't sleep, she did not recognize me, and she said everyone was bad and she didn't trust anyone. She was in two different hospitals for five weeks. The doctor diagnosed her with severe *bipolar disorder*.

It's difficult when you have a child with a mental illness. I didn't understand anything about the education system or where to look for extra help for my daughter. And the teachers did not understand my daughter. They thought she was rebellious and didn't want to study. My daughter ended up hating school, the teachers, and the students. Then the school expelled my daughter. I think they didn't want to deal with her.

Advocating for Our Children

I would like to invite all families with disabled children to join the fight for better support for

our children. We should call on our elected representatives to make our schools better. There should be mental health professionals at the schools, so that students with special needs or disabilities can get their needs met.

In March 2023, I went to the *state capitol* in Oregon with the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality (<https://www.skcequality.org/>). I gave my *testimony* so that they would pass a law that would give more funds for mental health. Our *advocacy* worked, and the *bill* was approved. Now there is more funding to support families with disabilities.

If my daughter had had the proper support from mental health professionals, the school would have detected the symptoms of *bipolar disorder* and not expelled her from school. She would have graduated and been able to go to college and achieve her goals.

Our Journey Has Been a Long One

For many years, she took medication and saw a therapist. She took medication to be calm, to sleep, and to wake up. My daughter's mood changed. She was sometimes sad and sometimes happy. She laughed, cried, and screamed. I didn't know when it was okay to talk to her. Everything bothered her. Her character changed. She was always afraid to go out. She couldn't be in the park or in public places. When we went out to a family birthday party, she never wanted to stay very long.

It took a long time for me to understand her illness. I loved her very much, but I was suffering right along with her. It drove me crazy that I couldn't help her. I am so grateful to God and my family who were there for me and my daughter during the most difficult times. I also thank all the health professionals and counselors who supported my daughter.

Today my daughter is doing well. Years of medication and therapy helped her. Now she doesn't take any medication or see a therapist. She is happily married and has three boys. One of the boys has autism, and he will start school

in the fall. She has already found an organization to help him succeed. She knows what to do to help her son.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. The author says her journey with her daughter has been a long one. What are some of the key moments in the journey?
2. How did Angelica's desire to help her own child end up benefitting other children? Be specific.
3. Is there a bill or a law that you think would help your child and maybe other children in the community? Is there a community organization fighting for this law? If so, how can you connect with them? Write a letter to your congressperson explaining what you think about a current law. Find the name and address of your congressperson here:

<https://www.congress.gov/members>

Angelica Lagos is from Tulancingo, Hidalgo, Mexico. She is currently an ESOL student at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon. She likes to spend time with her four beautiful daughters. She volunteers at the daycare at her church and at Hope Station Community Services which helps those in need. She wants to go to college to learn more about how to help women and children.

