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## Let's Talk Mental Health, Houston! Ford Motor Company Fund, Congressional Award Foundation Host Virtual Workshop for Teens

**Houston, TX, Monday, October 19, 2020** – The Congressional Award Foundation (CAF) is providing a safe place for teens to share their personal experiences and to have access to mental health professionals. With the support of the **Ford Motor Company** and **Beal Consulting**, the non-profit has launched a series of Zoom-based webinars moderated by professionals to help teens aged 14-18 navigate COVID-19.

The mental health workshop that took place this week is one of many virtual programming experiences offered by the CAF to youth in the past several months, as the foundation has shifted its focus to remote learning opportunities for its participants across the country. This webinar was the 2<sup>nd</sup> of a series of mental health-focused interactive workshops.

In addition to giving students the opportunity to hear from influential leaders on the topic of mental and emotional wellbeing, breakout rooms also provided youth with a chance to share their personal experiences with one another in small groups. These breakout rooms provided a safe space for teens to be vulnerable and get meaningful feedback from mental health professionals – **Dr. Janice Beal** and her team of counselors moderated each discussion.

During the session, **Pamela Alexander** of the Ford Motor Company Fund discussed the company's commitment and how the partnership with CAF will help strengthen communities and provide students with unique access to meaningful resources and opportunities. She spoke of the [many initiatives](#) that the Ford Motor Company Fund is spearheading in response to the pandemic.

Students also heard from **Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee (TX-18)**, who was named "Legislator of the Year" by the National Mental Health Association for her outstanding work on mental health legislation. Rep. Jackson Lee stressed the importance of self-care and taking care of one another during these times. "Now more than ever, we must continue to check-in with ourselves and make sure we are all keeping our minds healthy," said the Congresswoman. "The times we're living through can be isolating, but as long as we all make our mental health a priority, and keep finding ways to connect with one another like this workshop today, I am confident we can come out of this stronger than ever."

Before sending the students into their breakout rooms, **Dr. MarTeze Hammonds** of MDH Consulting Group shared an inspiring keynote address. "We need each and every one of you to show up in your authentic self – that's who we want to see. You are special, you are important, and you are amazing, and we need every bit of you."

In addition to the words of encouragement, consolation, and reassurance from the different speakers, students were also provided concrete resources to help strengthen their mental health before a crisis arises, and learned what to do in a crisis situation.

Congressional Award Board Member and motivational speaker **Mateo Magdaleno** also reminded the youth that they are in control of their own destiny. “For many years I asked for my circumstances to be changed. But what if it’s not our circumstances that need to change, but us? Sometimes our circumstances don’t change because those circumstances are meant to change us.”

By providing resources to build a support system and empowering students to have honest conversations, the workshop was a big first step for many in erasing the stigma surrounding the topic of emotional wellbeing and mental health. The Foundation will continue to offer virtual programs to address the needs of youth as we navigate the pandemic, and other challenges presented in normal teenage life.

### **About**

The Congressional Award is the United States Congress’ only charity and the highest honor bestowed upon a youth civilian through the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Established by Congress as a public-private partnership in 1979 under Public Law 96-114, the program recognizes initiative, service, and achievement in youth ages 13 ½ - 23. Learn more at [www.congressionalaward.org](http://www.congressionalaward.org).

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