Hello! My name is Christine Siner. I am a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW), employed as a Mental Health Therapist with The Harris Center for Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Delays (The Harris Center) in Houston, Texas. We serve over 88,000 people per year. We are state-designated as the Local Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disability (IDD) Authority for Harris County. The agency empowers people with behavioral health and IDD needs to improve their lives through accessible, integrated, and comprehensive recovery oriented system of care. The Harris Center strives to provide high quality services for persons with mental disabilities regardless of their ability to pay, so that they may live a life with dignity as fully functioning, participating, and contributing members of our community.

It was an honor and privilege to attend the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) 2018 Conference. Being a Hispanic mother of one of the nearly five million Latinos living with a disability in the United States, I understand the importance of using my voice to advocate for those with visible and invisible disabilities. Although statistically mental illness among Latinos and whites are roughly equivalent, Latinos are far less likely to seek help for their symptoms. The stigma surrounding mental illness and Latinos presents a serious public health concern. Culturally, Latinos believe mental illness is being “loco,” and no one wants to be labeled “crazy.” Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the U.S. and face the greatest significant barriers. They are the highest uninsured rates of any ethnic group.
The conference provided me with an opportunity to not only dream but to actually take steps toward becoming one of the next Latino Leaders. The Accessibility Initiative by JP Morgan Chase and the World Institute on Disability (WID) provided me with an opportunity to engage and collaborate with individuals from diverse industries. I would like to express my deepest appreciation for the investment made in me as a Disability Ambassador. I am excited about the current and future work being done for individuals with disabilities in the Latinx Community and look forward to making a positive impact on the most vulnerable and in need.

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Christine Siner is a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW), employed as a Mental Health Therapist with The Harris Center for Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Delays in Houston, Texas. She is passionate about advocating for underserved and overlooked communities, including youth and young adults with mental health illnesses and disabilities. She hopes to be one of the next Latino Leaders in Texas.

Christine with WID's Elizabeth Layman and Subject Matter Expert Jessica Jimenez