**Nomination Statement**

**Mary Kate Dixon - Wicked Calm Candles**

I am writing this letter to express my interest in the potential nomination for the Clifford W. Beers award at the upcoming 2018 Mental Health America Conference. My name is Mary Kate Dixon, I am 26 years old, residing in Clayton, North Carolina. In July of 2016, after over a decade of struggling behind closed doors, I was formally diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder and began my journey towards a positive outlook on my life with mental illness. My disorder does not define who I am, or why I feel I am deserving of this award, it only helps me understand more deeply what my customers want and need. I am the sole creator of Wicked Calm Candles, a thriving small business with over 5,000 organic and avid followers in just one year’s time.

Before I dig into how I, and my organization, would be a great candidate for this honor I would like to tell you a short but important story. Back in 2016 I was creating natural, herb-infused, soy candles for myself as a means for self-care. Something my doctor highly recommended during my early battle with generalized anxiety disorder. I soon realized I had a gift, and a means for reaching people like myself who needed natural products, and a daily reminder to participate in self-care, something many individuals with mental illness struggle to do. I could not make these candles quick enough! When I tell you as soon as I listed ten, I would have a request for twenty. I was open from day one about my illness on Instagram, and have always posted relevant details about my anxiety management. I was naive to the very real stigma that exists against people like myself and unfortunately, I, like many others, learned the hard way how real it is.

With quick rising success, followers, and sales I decided to proactively reach out to local brick and mortar stores for possible wholesale locations. After a few dead ends, a local retailer agreed to meet with me to discuss their possible business. My short sales pitch was well received until the store owner asked me what my target market was. I expressed to this individual, who I will call Susie for all intensive purposes, that although my candles can be used by anyone, I primarily focused on reaching out to those with mental illness. The next words I heard from Susie completely changed my life. “There are not enough people out there who are mentally ill for me to find this profitable – After all, it is all in your head. You’d probably be better off at a craft fair.”

That is when my anxiety really kicked in. I fought back tears the entire rest of the conversation with Susie, and like most people with anxiety do, I replayed the entire scenario over in my head for weeks. Was I as alone as Susie claimed? I felt like I had let myself down and all the people out there who supported Wicked Calm Candles and what we stood for. The sadness turned to anger and that anger turned to drive. I will spare you all of the details but it wasn’t until I battled internally with the reality of the stigma against mental illness I had just witnessed that Wicked Calm Candles truly came to life.

Since that encounter with Susie, Wicked Calm Candles has partnered with the Brain and Behavior Research foundation to donate a portion of our revenue to their organization monthly. We have perfected, and continue to perfect our product, which is become a staple piece to thousands of self-care routine’s worldwide. I continue to make our loyal customers aware that they are not alone in their battle with mental illness regardless to how that may or may not affect my business. This May, Mental Health Awareness month, Wicked Calm Candles will be the featured front page seller on the cover of Handmade Seller Magazine with a multi-page spread surrounding the topic of mental health and our battle against the stigma that surrounds this topic. Despite the belief that mental illness is not as prevalent as some may think, our loyal customers come from word of mouth. Even more shocking, our advertising costs to reach our target market is almost non-existent. There is a need for my product and more importantly for companies like mine who focus on the idea that managing your mental illness, regardless to your diagnosis, can be achievable and affordable.

If it weren’t for the Susie’s in the world, Wicked Calm Candle’s would not be here and I would not be given the opportunity to speak on behalf of those like myself who yearn to become more than their illness. In the words of Dalai Llama, “If you can cultivate the right attitude, your enemies are your best spiritual teachers. Their presence provides you with the opportunity to enhance and develop tolerance, patience, and understanding.