

The Chicago Defender Names Dr. Marilyn Griffin a 2025 Women of Excellence Honoree

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The Chicago Defender recently introduced this year’s select group of honorees, recognizing Dr. Marilyn Griffin—an Easterseals board member and an adult, child, and adolescent psychiatrist and Behavioral Health Medical Director for Aetna Better Health of Illinois—for her dedication and profound impact in the field of medicine.

The Chicago Defender recently announced its 2025 Women of Excellence honorees, recognizing Dr. Marilyn Griffin for her dedication and impact in the field of medicine. The award celebrates African American women in the Chicago community who inspire others through their hard work, achievements, and positivity. Dr. Griffin is an adult, child, and adolescent psychiatrist and serves as the Behavioral Health Medical Director for Aetna Better Health of Illinois. She is also a board member of Easterseals Serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford (ECR).

Dr. Griffin's connection to Easterseals began in medical school during her psychiatry rotation at the University of Illinois College of Medicine (UICOM) in Rockford. While there, she was first introduced to The Autism Program (TAP) at Easterseals, which provides screenings, diagnostics, and resources for autism spectrum disorder.

After graduating, she left Rockford to complete a five-year, triple-board residency in general pediatrics, adult psychiatry, and child and adolescent psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Upon returning to the Rockford area as an attending physician, she connected with Easterseals through a bi-directional referral program with TAP, which helps ensure that patients can receive ongoing and coordinated support when needed. She later deepened her involvement through continued partnership while working at the UICOM's Chicago campus.

Dr. Griffin's connection to Easterseals came full circle in 2022 when TAP Program Manager Lori Davie introduced her to ECR President and CEO Sara Ray Stoelinga. Around the same time, Dr. Loris Rayner—an ECR board member and Dr. Griffin's colleague at Aetna Better Health of Illinois—recommended her for the organization's board. She wholeheartedly embraced the invitation.

A longtime admirer of Easterseals, Dr. Griffin credits the organization with playing an instrumental role in her education and training—from her early psychiatry rotation as a medical student to her years as an attending physician, when she frequently relied on its services to support her patients across the Chicagoland area. Now, as she approaches her third year on the board, she considers it an honor to contribute her clinical expertise and help shape solutions that make a meaningful impact on the community.

“I am amazed by the depth and breadth of the services, education, resources, and training Easterseals provides—not only to students and families but also to staff,” she said.

Being named an honoree by *The Chicago Defender* is another full-circle moment for Dr. Griffin. As a high school student, she was once featured in an article in the paper, and growing up, *The Defender*

was a household staple. Her father, an avid news reader, kept up with multiple dailies, and *The Defender* held a special place.

“It makes my heart full to know that this prominent African American newspaper has selected me as one of their honorees—an African American woman from the South Side of Chicago, part of the 2 percent of African American psychiatrists in our country. That’s incredible,” she said.

Being recognized for her work in health care, particularly in psychiatry, at a time when so many individuals face mental health, behavioral health, and substance use disorder challenges feels especially meaningful, she said. Doing this alongside Easterseals makes it even more so. “It’s such impactful work,” she said.

Dr. Griffin will be celebrated alongside other honorees at an awards ceremony on Friday, March 21, 2025.

The Chicago Defender covers news, events, and issues relevant to the African American community, amplifying culturally significant stories in Chicago. Readers can find it online at chicagodefender.com.

[Read more](#) about Dr. Marilyn Griffin.

[Read more](#) about *The Chicago Defender*’s 2025 Women of Excellence award.