

Testimony in favor of Raised Bill no. 422
Public Health Committee
February 29, 2008
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I am grateful for the opportunity to support Raised Bill 422, an Act Concerning Supportive Housing for Individuals with Mental Illness. It should be quite obvious by now that far too many people who suffer from mental illness have landed in our correctional system. In a shocking report released in September, **2006**, the Federal Bureau of Judicial Statistics noted that the number of mentally ill inmates in U.S. prisons and jails has quadrupled since our Blue Ribbon report was written in 2000, to 56% of those in state prisons, and 64% of those in jail.

As a mother of someone who has spent time in several correctional facilities, including Garner and Osborn, and who has been hospitalized for his mental illness more than 20 times, I know that prison is not a place where people with serious mental illness receive adequate treatment, support or supervision. Visits with a psychiatrist are too brief and far too infrequent. The environment is so noisy that most of us would decompensate, and we who have avoided jail time can only imagine the other environmental stressors they must face.

When such a person leaves prison, how can we expect anything but a relapse of behavior and thinking that got the person in trouble in the first place? You now have a person with poor coping skills, lack of insight into the need for continued treatment, and little to no resources, who must navigate multiple barriers. Social Security disability and insurances such as Medicaid stop when a person has been sentenced and must be re-applied for, appointments for therapy and medication management must be made, and housing must be found that is safe and affordable, to name just a few of these barriers to recovery. Generally only 1 or 2 weeks of medication is given to the person leaving prison, and most of us who benefit from a car, a stable place to live, a phone, and a rational mind would have trouble getting it all done.

Last year my son was homeless, paranoid, and refusing to take medication because he considers it to be toxic. When he was brought to the emergency room for evaluation after several people complained of his behavior, he assaulted a health care worker and was arrested. He did not improve significantly when in Garner and was hospitalized soon after leaving prison. I feel so powerless to help him and he does not have the insight to know how to help himself. Unless he receives adequate, long-term treatment, he will probably continue to get in trouble because of his illness. If he were treated in a supportive housing environment with the added firmness of involvement with the judicial system, he and others with similar problems would have a much better chance of recovery and stability. I believe this bill can make our streets safer, our prisons less crowded, emergency room visits and hospitalizations will decrease and money will be saved.

I strongly urge you to support this much-needed proposal! Thank you.