

March 8, 2013

Testimony to the Committee on Public Health

Fran Ludwig, Parent of a son with mental illness, and Vice-President of the Board of Directors of Gilead Community Services

Proposed SB No. 262, AN ACT REQUIRING NOTICE BY PSYCHIATRISTS CONCERNING PATIENTS THAT MAY POSE A THREAT TO THEMSELVES OR OTHERS

Good morning, Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and members of the committee. I am a parent of a son who lives with mental illness and Vice-President of the Board of Directors of Gilead Community services. Although I fully support the intent of this bill to provide help for individuals in crisis who may pose a threat to themselves or others, I have several concerns about SB 262.

1. My understanding is that a requirement already exists for mental health care providers to report individuals believed to be a threat to themselves or others. Because of its vagueness, SB 262 could expose health care providers to unreasonable risk of liability.
2. I am also concerned that this bill may actually discourage individuals who need mental health care from seeking it, for fear that they may be involuntarily committed, whether this is a justified concern or not. This could produce the opposite effect of the intent of this bill.
3. I believe that the primary concern of this bill could be more effectively addressed by reducing the need for crisis care. There is good evidence that effectively treating the underlying causes of mental illness and appropriately meeting the needs of the individual, can eliminate or greatly reduce behaviors that could cause harm. This has certainly been true for my son.

I'd like to suggest that the most effective way to address the concerns of SB 262 is to adequately fund community mental health providers who can appropriately treat and manage the symptoms of mental illness.

As evidence, I'd like to point to the example of 13 clients with complex mental health diagnoses who had each spent more than 10 years in inpatient settings. Over the past two years, these clients have been transferred to specially designed

supported apartment programs at Gilead. To date, none have been re-hospitalized. This has not only greatly improved the lives of the individuals, but generated a cost savings to the state of \$3,500,000 per year.

Gilead and other community mental health providers have been starved for funding over the past 20 years and desperately need a cost-of-living increase to remain a viable option. The type of savings generated by these 13 clients can offer a solution to the funding crisis, allowing us to maintain robust community mental health supports, which can greatly reduce the behaviors that may require reporting and require crisis care.

We see ourselves as partners with the state in addressing concerns about mental health, and would love an opportunity to meet with you to discuss our ideas for ways to keep our community mental health system healthy and viable.

Thank you.