

I am strongly opposed to ABI Waiver II. The implementation of ABI Waiver II will lead to significant harm, serious crisis and put the health and safety of present and future brain injury survivors and their families in CT at great risk.

The new Waiver is nothing but a vehicle to allow Dept. of Social Services to jump over people on the current wait list in order to provide services for people at the back of the wait list who will save the state more money.

This unethical and immoral way of choosing who will receive services in CT is frightening for people of ALL disabilities. This means determining services is not based on need and the date of application for services; rather, CT can choose to create new methods to determine who gets life-changing services based on the calculation of how many dollars they will save CT. This is not only immoral, but a violation of civil rights.

Expand and improve the current ABI waiver program - don't kill it! Look at somebody like me, before getting the current waiver services; I was homeless, and being thrown inside prisons and even psychiatric hospitals for years at a time.

11 Years Later I am very proud and I'm very happy to say that I have yet to be thrown back into a prison, homeless, or hospitalized; I have now become a National Advocate for Brain Injury survivors and their families. I've been in meetings with congressional leaders, speaking firsthand with people that can affect change. It's clear to me without the support and services of the current ABI waiver I wouldn't be able to survive, and I'm sure that everybody who is on the current waiver feels the same way. I don't get it; instead Department of Social Services is requesting funding for a new, very large Waiver. When we have been told for years they cannot expand the current Waiver. I don't get it; why can't they take the current waiver that is working for the brain Injury survivor and their families and make it better? I just want other brain injury survivors to have the same opportunities as I have had, and I will support any and all Legislators and decision makers who support me and other brain injury survivors!

Please, stop the new ABI waiver! Expand and improve the current ABI waiver.

Add INS if needed

THE CURRENT ABI WAIVER IS A PERSON CENTERED PROGRAM! The State of Ct feels it can be person-centered when it's convenient for them and then state driven when it's inconvenient for the State! Completely unacceptable in my opinion!

There's a world of difference between someone with TBI and someone suffering from mental illness.

FACT; the new Waiver is a mental health support model instead of a brain injury rehabilitative model... Moreover the practice violates our rights secured by the fourteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ... to be free from undue restraint, to receive training sufficient to prevent the deterioration of basic self – care skills... And to live in a safe environment guaranteed to them by due process clause.

As it was in the 1990's when I became a member of Connecticut's class action lawsuit advocating for Connecticut's Acquired Brain Injury/Traumatic Brain Injury (ABI/TBI) Medicaid Waiver

Stop the new waiver! Expand and improve the current waiver

AKA
Craig Sears

Brain-injured pushing to stop trauma of state confinement

Nudging toward normalcy, brain-injured challenge state

By MARIAN GAIL BROWN
Staff writer

Craig Sersesky thumbed through a cardboard pouch that contained all of his important papers until he found what was looking for. It was a tiny scrap of a paper, a things-to-do list, of all that he wanted to accomplish this day.

It mentioned activities such as taking a shower, checking a post office box, making phone calls. It has a long list in a shaky, unsteady handwriting, evidencing a kind of penmanship you see when children are learning to write.

But Sersesky isn't a kid. He's a 27-year-old former auto mechanic who struggles each day to recall the things he once knew, to keep his temper in check and cope with constant, pounding headaches.

Sersesky suffered a traumatic brain injury in 1987 when he was

thrown 40 feet from the motorcade he was riding without a helmet. His skull was fractured. He underwent several surgeries — some of them while he languished in a six-month-long coma.

"Yeah, this is not the life I want for myself... going from couch to couch, sleeping wherever someone will let me," Sersesky said. "But it sure beats the alternative."

The alternative in question is a one-way ticket to a life spent in side one of the state's psychiatric hospitals. That's the way, Connecticut deals with people suffering from traumatic brain injuries.

"It institutionalizes them, warehouses them indefinitely," says David Shaw, a Hartford lawyer representing Sersesky and others with similar neurological damage in a class-action lawsuit pending in U.S.

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District Court at New Haven. "I've been down in a locked ward at one of these places," Sersesky said of his stay in one of the state's psychiatric facilities. "It's a cruel fate. Cruel and unusual punishment that anybody has to be treated the way they treated us."

To hear Sersesky tell it, it sounds like a stay in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." Over a cup of coffee and a couple of blueberry muffins, Sersesky recalled being forcibly restrained and given sedatives and other drugs — the names of which he can't remember — to control his outbursts.

The problem is that these hospitals aren't equipped to adequately treat people with traumatic brain injuries.

There's a world of difference between someone with TBI and someone suffering from a mental illness, according to Richard McLaughlin of the Traumatic Brain Injury Association, a lobbying/support group for victims of TBI and their families.

"The reality is, there are no organized services or support programs for people like Craig Sersesky who are afflicted with TBI," McLaughlin said. "He's between a rock and a hard place. There are no group homes, therapy or vocational training or cognitive learning programs for people with TBI," McLaughlin said.

And there is no one, no state agency (neither the Department of Mental Health, nor Department of Mental Retardation) who has statutory authority to establish them.

It's a bureaucratic quagmire. "Every top decision-making commissioner or psychiatrist I depicted in this case says these peo-

"All of my future is depending on how this lawsuit works out," Sersesky says, speaking slowly, slurring his words between sips of coffee.

"People look at me, hear how I talk and think 'Gee, this only the morning and this guy is already drunk.' And I'm not. It's the way I sound."

Shaw said, "It's a crazy situation. The state Department of Mental Health, because it says it lacks statutory authority, claims it doesn't have the ability to set up supervised group homes."

The choices for people like Sersesky are few. A life sentence in a psychiatric hospital. Straining family resources at home. Or, like Sersesky, opting for a life on the streets, punctuated by brief stays in homeless shelters.

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In the class-action complaint, 25 people with TBI who have been placed in Norwich, Fairfield Hills and Connecticut Valley hospitals are asking the court to block the state Department of Mental Health

from placing non-dangerous retarded or brain-injured people in hospitals for the mentally ill.

The plaintiffs contend that these custodial placements are made when there is nowhere else to put them. Moreover, they claim, the practice "violates the plaintiffs' rights secured by the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (and) the Rehabilitation Act of 1973... to be free from undue restraint, to receive training sufficient to prevent the deterioration of basic self-care skills... and to live in a safe environment guaranteed to them by the due process clause."

The complaint also describes the plight of one 15-year resident of Fairfield Hills Hospital, Burton Hawley, who suffered a brain injury in a car accident.

Hawley has had no chance to contest his placement at the facility. As a result, the lawsuit states, Hawley has been "unfairly stigmatized as a person who is dangerous and is suffering from a mental illness."

As for Sersesky, he has no idea where he will sleep tonight. Going to several shelters in Fairfield County is out of the question. "I've been banned... because I've broken the rules [about arriving by a specified time]. The rules that don't make sense. And I've gotten into [fights] with people... when I've had these headaches. So, I can't really blame them," he said, glancing down at his three-week running shoes. "I'll just keep doing what I'm doing. And hopefully, when this lawsuit is over, I'll have a place that can be a home."

Until then, Sersesky said, his home will be the road or a couch in some good Samaritan's home "where I can do odd jobs," he said, "just to tide me over."

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