

Testimony In Opposition to HB 5531  
by Cheri A. Bragg  
March 16, 2015

Good afternoon/evening Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and distinguished members of the Judiciary committee. I am submitting testimony today in opposition to HB 5531, An Act Concerning the Care and Treatment of Persons with a Mental Illness or Substance Use Disorder.

This intent of this bill can be summed up in one mythical sentence: "Just take your medication and everything will instantly be okay!"

First of all, there is nothing dignified about force. Period. Second, ALL of this is based upon the false presumptions that: 1) Medication always works and that 2) Treatment ONLY equals medication. Both of these are false. Treatment can mean so much more including therapy, meditation, yoga, hobbies, safe, affordable housing, a meaningful role in the community, supportive friends and family, exercise, etc. Medication doesn't work for everyone. Since the general public is under the false assumption that it is an instant cure-all, let me say that again another way. In the NIMH CATIE study, up to 74% of people chose to discontinue medication over an 18 month period of time. That means that about 25% of people choose to stay on anti-psychotic medication (NIMH CATIE study), with the trade-off being potentially life-altering side-effects and the possibility of dying an average of 25 years earlier than your peers(SAMHSA).

My mother, who was sucked into the mental health system for most of her adult life, took multiple medications in facilities and the community over almost 45 years. NOT ONCE during all that time did she suddenly admit to having a "mental illness". And the period of time when she appeared to feel most "well", was the period of time when she was on very little medication, but had increased social and recreational opportunities and support. But nursing facilities attempted to have her hospitalized and forcibly medicated several times anyway, including illegally PECing her because she wouldn't take her blood pressure medication. I wonder if anyone here has ever not taken their blood pressure medication or any other medication? They tried to take my conservatorship of person away because I wouldn't force psychiatric medications after my due consideration of the facts and her wishes. At the probate court, we found out that the lawyer appointed to represent her was going to illegally just say that they should take away my conservatorship without ever having spoken to my mother, let alone asking about her wishes, which again is illegal.. Another long-term probate appointed lawyer didn't even know that conservators have to have special authorization to authorize forced medication. This bill increases the chances for these types of circumstances to happen even more frequently than they do now.

Last November, a facility finally sent her to the hospital to rule out physical issues when she suddenly developed the feeling of being "shocked" throughout her body. This was chalked up as "delusional" by the facility, even when she fell from her wheel chair. Wracked with physical pain and further traumatized by some of the physical assessments, I'll never forget hearing an e.r. doctor shoving aside my concerns with "She just has to take her medications!" chalking it all up once again to her "mental health". In fact, she had stage 4 ovarian cancer and passed away on December 31st, 2015.

Forced medication is not the answer. An honest collaboration to look at trauma, stress, medication for some people as a last line of "treatment" when it works for them, increased

access to what does work for people by listening to people...this would be a start. Please don't let the deaths of all the people like my mother who have suffered at the hands of a broken system be in vain. Don't implement more of what doesn't work. Reject HB 5531. Thank you.

"It is both a blessing  
And a curse  
To feel everything  
So very deeply"

"To exercise the heart muscle, lift another person's spirits when you can."