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H.B. 5531 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CARE AND TREATMENT OF PERSONS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

Dear Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and Representatives of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Daniel Ogluin, and I'm from West Hartford, Connecticut.

My initial experiences with medications made my situation worse. The first drug I was put on made my depression and thoughts of suicide much stronger. The second drug I was put on worked very well. My doctor ignored this because he believed the drug wasn't at the therapeutic dose, and increased the drug. This made my depression and suicidal thoughts full blown and ever present. The doctor then decided it would be best to go off the drug cold turkey even though I was struggling more than ever. The month of withdrawal that followed was the worst month of my life. I had hallucinations that there were people in my house trying to kill me, vivid disturbing dreams, constant feelings of bugs crawling on my skin, and feelings that the floor was shifting and the walls were closing in on me.

I went in to the hospital because I was suicidal, and almost every medication decision a doctor made pushed me even closer to suicide. I ended up at Brattleboro retreat in Brattleboro Vermont, and the doctors up there adjusted my meds based on what I said, instead of how my body was supposed to react to drugs. The combination of their open ears and creative drug applications is what saved my life. But open ears and creative drug use is not expected of psychiatrists, and it causes a lot of problems. The issue I have with forced medication is that it would make a part of the system that is already a problem, worse. If I couldn't get a doctor to listen to me when it was voluntary, do you really believe giving them more power to forcibly medicate is going to improve the possibility that they'll listen?

What about the people with mental health problems who could use treatment but refuse? Maybe instead of asking how we can get these people to take their meds, we should ask why they don't they take them. It's important to understand that even though medications might dampen symptoms, the side effects can make overall mental health worse. As you are aware it is difficult living with mental health challenges, but I can assure you it can be even worse trying to live with the side effects of medication. I don't think many people would refuse treatment if treatment meant more than a trade off, and actually meant improvement. Medications can be a part of treatment, but there has to be a real and respectful doctor patient relationship as well as other less invasive but also effective treatments.

Having constituents or people in your life who refuse treatment might make you feel helpless, but medication often goes very wrong even when voluntary, and focusing only on suppressing symptoms and not greater mental health leads to failure and relapse. Two years ago, I testified before the Task Force to Study the Provision of Behavioral Health Services for Young Adults. I made suggestions for alternate treatments, and my peers have also made suggestions, but it's been made clear that the only suggestions that matter are those of psychiatrists.