

To Legislators and Committee members,

I am writing to you concerning mental health in Ct. I am 57, and have had depression all my life, since I was a small child. I have also experienced problems with guns during during my childhood, so I think I can speak a little on that also.

I have obviously been dealing with the mental health system for many years, and have found it getting worse and worse over time. It's terrible.

I grew up in a house with a "father" who has been found to be a terrorist by mental health professionals. I grew up in fear and terror, meanwhile having severe depression as a child. My mother was useless. My father used guns to get what he wanted, and to get his point across. I know how it is for a child to have to look at a gun. I know the terror. A gun does not have to go off to create terror and fear. Especially as a child, you have no idea if it's loaded, or if he really is going to shoot. This person, even back then, NEVER should have been allowed access to a gun. My grandfather, a wonderful man, and a retired New Haven police officer then, new the danger we were in. He tried to get us to live with them. One day, as I was standing between my father and grandfather, who was trying to talk my father into letting us stay. My father pulled out a gun and put it to his head, telling him, "No way old man". This is just a very, very small example of what life was life. Beatings, etc.

On the mental health side, I have been on both sides of "the fence". Without insurance and with. Without insurance, no way to pay for my meds. It's not pretty. I have traveled all parts of the state during my lifetime in an effort to be diagnosed. Psychiatrists, therapists, psychologists, you name it. Amazingly, no one came up with a proper diagnoses. I suffered for most of my life.

In 1995 (?), I found Mary Stephens, a therapist in Lakeville at Northwest Mental Health. When I first started going there, it was a great place, great director. Over time, it changed drastically for the worst. Three of their best therapists finally had enough and struck out on their own, including Mary, who I followed to Canaan. The point is, after all these high priced doctors, diplomas on the walls, I found Mary, a therapist, who saved my life. She diagnosed me correctly, and I started receiving SSDI, which I had needed desperately for all those years. I was finally diagnosed with chronic and disabling depression, anxiety and PTSD, among other things. This is why I

could never hold down a job. It wasn't me per say, I wasn't lazy, there was a reason why this was happening.

Just think what could have happened, what I might have done differently with my life if I had had this diagnoses years earlier.

The point is, why didn't all these other professionals see it? One of the problems with the mental health system, besides funding, awareness and proper diagnoses is that we do NOT have enough good, qualified doctors. I have been through the medical system for the last 15 years for other problems, such as knee replacement, 5 back surgeries, and HCV therapy, among others. Believe me, bad doctors there also. But we can't go on in the mental health system with just "warm bodies" treating patients. If they aren't any good at what they do, they are just causing more harm. Just because you have more frames on the wall than the next man or woman, doesn't mean you're good at what you do.

I think there should be more stringent control, or oversight on these doctors. If a teacher isn't doing their job to the best of their ability, what happens now? It should be the same for people you are treating. In many cases in the mental health system, this could mean life or death, or being productive members of society.

I could go on and on, but in closing, I have become very uncomfortable, and a little fearful lately. With all the attention since Newtown (believe me, rightly so) and this focus on guns and mental health, I'm afraid people with mental health problems of any kind are being blamed for everything and anything. We are a target of sorts. I wouldn't dare tell any these days about my depression. The stigma was bad enough before, now, it's even worse. It seems as though if you have a mental illness, watch out.

I'm all for gun control. Everything and anything you can do. But remember, anyone can snap. Anyone is capable of doing horrific things. Given the right stressors, or life gets bad enough, even someone without mental illness that has a gun is capable of anything. You never know who it will be or when. If any of you have any questions regarding this email, by all means please ask. I would be happy to answer any questions you have. Thank you so much for taking the time to read this and listening.

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"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do. Eleanor Roosevelt