

My name is Laura Gerbe. I am writing to ask for a much needed change to the law in regards to mentally ill patients and medication non-compliance in order to create a safer Connecticut. It is simple but very important this is done without waiting any longer. Connecticut needs to adopt the Assisted Outpatient Treatment Law (AOT) that 44 other states have already passed (see Kendra's Law).

Forty-four states permit the use of assisted outpatient treatment (AOT), also called outpatient commitment. AOT is court-ordered treatment (including medication) for individuals who have a history of medication non-compliance, as a condition of their remaining in the community. Studies and data from states using AOT prove that it is effective in reducing the incidence and duration of hospitalization, homelessness, arrests and incarcerations, victimization, and violent episodes. AOT also increases treatment compliance and promotes long-term voluntary compliance, while reducing caregiver stress. The six states that do not have AOT are **Connecticut**, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Nevada, and Tennessee.

This touches my life personally, as I have a brother, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia 12 years ago. He has been suffering with this illness, as has his family, since that time. After years of trying to find the right medical 'cocktail' that actually works for Kevin, we have been lucky enough to find one. While on his medication, Kevin is very functional, he does not suffer from delusions, paranoia, or hallucinations. He can smile, engage, and communicate. He has even been able to obtain and hold a job and be an upstanding citizen as the rest of us are. However, while off his medication, he and his entire family suffer, seeing him decline severely. The problem is, this mental illness effects the patient's brain and the ability to make rational decisions that are in the best judgment of themselves, and therefore others. Because the brain is compromised, the patient, my brother, constantly thinks he does not need medication (the illness tells him this) so he stops taking it each and every time he is discharged from the hospital. He has been in and out of the hospital 10 times now and he is only 38 years old. This is a waste of his life, the lives of his family, and is a complete injustice to his human existence. The law, the way it is, is not helping the patients at all and is making this state unsafe!

My mother has been appointed conservator of my brother and is allowed to manage all other aspects of his well-being, which he and she both agree is helpful to him, however, the law says she cannot assist in the decision for him to take medication - no one can. His doctor and the probate judge's hands are tied because of the law as well. As we all know, the way the law is written, until the person is 'a harm to themselves or other's', no one can do a thing. Why would we want to wait until someone is a harm to themselves or someone else before giving them the care they so need?? This is dangerous and there are better ways.

The solution is a simple one: What I am asking is that Connecticut Legislators pass the Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) Law that 44 other states already have in place. I strongly feel and know that this judgment for this law would help patients, families, and communities be safer, and live in a more humane world. There are only 6 states that have not adopted this law and I am embarrassed that Connecticut is still one of them!?! What are we waiting for? Please let those children and teachers in Newtown who gave their lives move you to vote to pass the AOT law in Connecticut now. Voting "yes" for the Assisted Outpatient Treatment Law would be a step in the right direction toward safety and helping patients and families not have to suffer from these crazy logistics in addition to the suffering of the illness itself; suffering that the opposing parties against adding this law do not live with or understand. Without this AOT law in place, we are one of only 6 states that is saying that

we'd rather let mentally ill patients be amongst us in society - off their medication - with a potential to become violent - and we'll deal with them when they break the law putting them in jail...

**Assisted Outpatient Treatment DOES NOT take away someone's civil rights. Severe mental illness, *not* its treatment, restricts civil liberties. By assuring timely and effective intervention for the disabling medical condition of severe mental illness, assisted outpatient treatment restores the capacity to exercise civil liberties and reduces the likelihood of the loss of liberty or life as a result of arrest, incarceration, hospitalization, victimization, suicide and other common outcomes of non-treatment.

I truly believe the time for change is now. Thank you for considering my plea and for taking the time to review all testimonies to make change and do better.

Laura Gerbe