

PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY OF LEROY GARDNER

My name is Leroy Gardner. I live in Norwich, CT, the location of a recent "Suicide-by-Cop" Incident. I've written testimony to these sorts of panels many times in the past, but unfortunately, I've never been able to follow it up with any oral presentation. Perhaps that worked in my favor, as I did not always know how to deal with the dilemma of having only three minutes to try and squeeze in over 30 years worth of mental health care administered to me by the State of Connecticut. This began with a brief stay in a Children's' Mental Health Facility that occurred during a very dark period in my childhood when I was a sexual abuse victim. This played a part, more than likely, in my continued, and currently ongoing involvement with this "*Giant Machine*" that is the State Mental Health System, and alternatively it's' contributed to my years and years in the State Prison System.

However, of late, even lifelong, law-abiding citizens (not just me) feel these penal institutions have basically become de facto mental health facilities, which I personally feel is due to the ineffectiveness on the part of the State Mental Health System to properly identify, early-on, and then treat various mental health problems. Therefore it is somewhat fitting that as we convene today, this **Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention & Children's Safety Mental Health Services Working Group Informational Forum**, that many components of this forum transcend on many level, ironically, much of my own personal history.

Now, with that said, I ask: *Does my unique personal experience make me an "Expert" on this subject?* ", as say, for example, a mentor of mine, Dr. Robert Davidson, Executive Director of the Eastern Region Mental Health Board, or can I presume to possess the same level of knowledge of a Policy Maker perhaps somewhat more related, like Mike Lawlor, Undersecretary of the Office of Policy and Management whose gone on record many times, specifically expressing the same viewpoints I have, that there is a direct correlation between the ineffective mental health system in bolstering the unnecessary(ineffective) overcrowding of the prison system. So therefore, my answer is **NO**, documented "Expertise", is not required to make an impact in presenting testimony before this or similar panels, *but*, however, I think those seated on these panels need to lend whatever acquired expertise they have, and apply it to acknowledging the sincere, passionate, and insightful remarks presented here today.

Most significantly, where this flawed mental health system is a serious public safety threat, is when marginally, mentally-challenged individuals spend even just small amounts of time incarcerated, whereupon, their already distorted and ill-formed precepts then have time to incubate and morph. This leads to an additional serious collateral effect in that now having been labeled and identified as "Offenders"; more suitable attention is then not given to these persons as "Clients" in need of rigorous mental health counseling. Subsequently, we end up with somewhat related tragic incidents like Sandy Hook, but also, as well, those more personally resonating for me, such as I mentioned earlier, with this troubled young man(a personal acquaintance of mine) from my small hometown of Norwich, CT, named Jason Razzino. Jason gave up in frustration at the prospect of

having to navigate the convoluted, overtaxed, inadequate community mental health system, so instead he summoned police to his home where he shot an officer four times and then eventually turned the gun on himself.

Leroy Gardner
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