

**Bipartisan Subcommittee on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety
Mental Health Working Group
January 29, 2013**

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Hello - my name is Michaela Fissel and I am a current resident of Windsor, Connecticut. I am here today to respectfully request that you **take a position against proposed legislation that would limit the right of a youth or young adult to decide at what point or where they access mental health treatment.** This would be a bill that resembles or includes outpatient commitment. For example, **H.B. No. 5681, 5683, and 6228.**

I make this request as a young person in long-term recovery from a primary diagnosis of bipolar disorder, and as someone who would have been a strong candidate for outpatient commitment. I am confident that as someone who denied my illness and refused to comply with treatment on multiple occasions that outpatient commitment would have been the solution that my family would have sought.

I draw this conclusion, based on the desperation, anger, and helplessness of those around me as they watched me cycled through mania, and into psychosis, followed by deep depression, and on two occasions, attempted suicide. I can only imagine the terror as I was found on the bathroom floor unconscious due to an overdose of prescribed medication. That is correct, prescribed medication.

I took my medication as prescribed for about 6 months. Despite the fact that one-month into treatment, I was dead to the world. For the first three months of my treatment, I was part of an intensive outpatient program, but I didn't relate to anyone in the groups because they were twice my age and had no relevancy to my experience of being young in the 21st century. I was discharged because, as noted within my progress notes, I was stabilized and no longer in need of treatment.

Upon discharge, I couldn't make it from breakfast to lunch because I was too tired as a side effect of the mood stabilizers. I couldn't write a legible word because the muscles in my hands were too rigid from the antipsychotic medication. I couldn't even form a single cohesive thought. It was like I spent nearly my entire adolescence experiencing the untreated symptoms of a serious mental illness, only to reach adulthood and find that the next best thing to being crazy was being completely unresponsive to the realities of my existence.

Upon completing 6th month of treatment, I decided that I would rather die than continue to be a zombie.

It took me a few more years of homelessness, heavy drug use, involvement with the criminal justice system for me to wake up to the reality of having a future. It was like an 'ah ha' moment. I can remember hearing the word recovery, and I thought, *there is a way for me to get out of this spiral? Why didn't anyone tell me that I could belong to this amazing group of young people?*

At that point, I decided to hook up with a peer support group at Central Connecticut State University, and I began to rebuild my identity beyond my diagnosis. I received supported education through CCSU, I began treatment with an independent provider, and I started to take my recovery seriously. Looking back, I realize that I had to recognize that I had a life worth living before anything was going to help me to regain a position in the community as a contributing member of society.

I believe that our system would greatly benefit from your continued support of enhancing the culture of recovery in our state by completing the recovery-oriented system of care. One significant gap, which remains unfilled, is the lack of cross systems peer-support services. I would encourage you to consider this approach to assisting young people achieve recovery prior to implementing outpatient commitment.

In conclusion, I respectfully request that you stand with me, and discourage an approach that would limit the rights of individuals to decide when and where they access mental health treatment. Empower me, and my peers, with the right to make informed decisions about what options we have while we work diligently to make a life that we believe is worth living.