

My name is Paula Seivers and I am from Branford, CT.

In response to the Sandy Hook tragedy, I would like to take this opportunity to dispel the misunderstandings that surround it; the unjustifiable culpability attached to the mentally ill population. The root cause of many assailants has stemmed from anger, feelings of abandonment, and lack of love. In other words, they often come from dysfunctional homes and had none of the symptoms of chronic mental illness.

I have suffered 40 years on the debilitating roller coaster of bipolar schizoid affective disorder. For the first 10 years of my struggle, I was devastated. I was depressed, empty, without hope, fearful, guilt-ridden, delusional, and unable to go to school or hold a job. It was only with psychiatric help, medication and the love and willingness to understand on the part of my family that I survived. Do you think that Hollywood's portrayal of the insane asylums or families hiding their sick relatives in closets did anything to dispel the stigma among the public toward mental illness?

Because of my personal testimony, I feel well qualified to bring to your attention these three things in order to assist you in dealing with mental health issues in the schools:

First: The mentally ill that I have met, and there have been hundreds, struggle with their own demons inside. They do not blame, hate, or exhibit anything but humility in their desperate fight to experience some kind of normal functioning. Often times, they are self-destructive, but not aiming their frustrations toward others.

Second: If the mentally ill have loving reliable caregivers, they are extremely fortunate. Countless victims however live in poverty, seclusion, and are homeless. Others are involuntarily incarcerated or die. We must address this issue. Medical attention is so expensive that it is an impossibility for many to take advantage of it. The paperwork involved in obtaining any kind of social, employment, or monetary assistance is complicated and often difficult for a mentally handicapped person to complete. The time lapse between applications and assistance is so long that many consumers fall through the cracks in the meantime.

And **Third:** Unless we are willing to listen and communicate with love and understanding for the despair and struggles of the mentally ill, the stigma will continue. It is with this in mind that I humbly make this plea to the legislative committee to **please** continue to listen and respond appropriately with respect and love for the mentally ill community as many of you have already done. Raising awareness, fighting stigma, providing funds for the National Affiliation for the treatment of the mentally ill, and treating us as human beings are all positive measures which we must continue to address. I would like to thank each one of you on this committee and may God Bless you and grant you His wisdom as you proceed.