

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE BIPARTISAN TASK FORCE ON
GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SAFETY**

**MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES WORKING GROUP
January 29, 2013**

Good afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Wood and members of the Task Force's Mental Health Services Working Group. My name is Thomas Burr, and I am the Communications Manager for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Connecticut Chapter. I am also a former Board Member of NAMI Connecticut, as well as former Board Member and former President of the NAMI Manchester CT Affiliate. I also serve the NAMI Manchester affiliate as a trained Family and Friends Support Group Facilitator. However, as you have already heard from Daniela Giordano, who is the Public Policy Director for Adults, State and National Matters with NAMI Connecticut, and has already addressed you this morning as the official representative of our organization, I am therefore speaking on my own behalf today.

As most everyone in the state of CT, I was deeply saddened by the recent tragedy that took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. I applaud the CT Legislatures efforts to hold these hearings, so some good can result from this awful event.

While Ms. Giordano has already covered our organizations recommendations, I wish to share my own perspective on things. I am the parent of an adult child who is in recovery from Bipolar disorder. When our son became ill, my wife and I endured 8 years of what I describe as every parent's nightmare. At various times he was hospitalized, incarcerated, homeless, and very, very sick. And in so much pain he tried to kill himself more times than I can bear to recall, in fact twice at our home, in front of his two sisters, which were 2 and 4 years old at the time. My wife and I had to make the awful decision to bar him from our home, as having him live with us was just too chaotic. The good news is he is doing fine now; he has been in recovery for approximately 5 years. He is working, and sober; he bought a condominium with his own money 3 years ago, and is engaged to be married to an amazing woman this spring. He is like a Poster Child for recovery, and I share this because I want everyone to know that people can and do recover from serious mental illness.

As far as what this Task Force is chartered to do, again you have already heard a list of recommendations from Ms. Giordano. I feel compelled to reiterate a couple of her key points:

As a state, we must not take reactive or regressive measures which would further stigmatize and discriminate against people with mental illness, which will reinforce people not seeking treatment. I oppose reactive and regressive measures such as involuntary outpatient commitment for numerous reasons including that it conflicts with Connecticut's recovery-oriented system of care, is expensive and diverts funds from needed and effective services, and singles out persons with mental illness. What we should do instead is replicate and expand the services and models we know work well, so that they are more widely available and can serve more people effectively.

In my sons case, he was forcibly restrained and forcibly medicated on several occasions, which made it extremely challenging to get him to agree to seek treatment when he so desperately needed it. He simply did not trust the medical community, after experiencing the ill-treatment at their hands. I suspect that the 8 years he spent bouncing around in crisis before beginning to seriously work on his recovery could have been dramatically shortened, if he had not been

treated against his will. People suffering from severe mental illness need to feel in control of their lives. Forcing treatment upon them, no matter how well intentioned, is completely counter-productive. I know, because I have seen it first-hand.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer questions you may have.

Respectfully,

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