

S.287- Public Comment  
Mark Pendergrast

I am a scholar, researcher, and writer, and I live in Colchester, VT. One of my books, *Victims of Memory* (Upper Access, 1996, 2d ed), is relevant to the debate over S287, the bill regarding involuntary commitment. My book was about a terribly misguided form of psychotherapy in which well-intentioned therapists convinced many people that they had "repressed memories" of sexual abuse from childhood. The result was much misery, broken families, lost jobs, involuntary commitments, and all too many suicides. As part of my research, I found that psychiatrists cannot predict self-harm or violence any better than throwing dice, and sometimes worse. I am opposed to the passage of S287. Despite judicial oversight, I fear that it would simply result in the rubber-stamping of whatever a psychiatrist recommended.

Our system of care for seriously mentally ill patients is in trouble because not enough resources are made available to it. It needs more (and adequately staffed) inpatient beds and more community discharge options. If there were sufficient capacity there would be more time for people to get through episodes and for doctors to negotiate with them. A fast-moving conveyor-belt approach to disturbed patients, relying on drugs and coercion, is not a system of care and ultimately won't save money because people will be damaged by it and will require even more care, more hearings, and more conflict.

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