

Dear Vermont State Senators and Representatives,

Please allow me to introduce myself, my name is Melissa Disorda and I am a resident of Pittsford. I have lived in Vermont all my life and am proud to raise my son in this amazing community. It came to my attention last week that there is bill that was introduced this year by Senators Ayer, Sears and White regarding involuntary hospitalization and medication specifically as it relates to mental health patients.

Mental health diseases and disorders are a silent part of our world, although in the recent years it has come to the forefront due to horrific tragedies. Due to the stigmas attached to mental health illnesses many individuals suffering with unstable mental health along with their support network keep their struggle quiet. The recent tragic events have not eased the stigmas; consequently, keeping individuals struggling with such matters isolated due to fear of being stereotyped, judged or worse.

After giving this matter great thought I am about to say something that I never thought that I would publicly utter, for over half of my life, since I was fifteen years old, I have struggled with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). During this time I have been admitted for inpatient psychiatric care on a few occasions due to attempted suicide and suicidal ideation, been supported by various therapists, tried numerous medications, purchased a light for therapy and have been blessed with an amazing support system. Over the years my continued struggle with SAD adversely affects my ability to maintain relationships during the winter months, obtain the education as I had dreamed of as a girl, be an efficient and effective employee, and at times it adversely affects my ability to be the loving and engaging mother and wife that I know I can be.

When it came to my attention that there was a bill introduced regarding involuntary hospitalization and medication I was alarmed. I admit that I was longing to understand how this proposed law could impact me and my family. As I read the suggested amendments to the apparently already established law I was left speechless and full of fear. I found myself asking how my SAD was different than someone with diabetes or cancer. I reflected on a statement that physicians that diagnosed me with SAD said to me one year when I was struggling with the decision to start my medications before my seasonal depression grabbed hold of me. He explained to me how prescribing antidepressant for SAD was not any different than the insulin for the diabetic. Both patients need manufactured medication to regulate their systems. Thinking about that concept I remembered that I am my disorder is not different which brings me to these rhetorical questions. Would we make it illegal for a diabetic to eat items with sugar? Would we admit a cancer patient against their will and force them to receive radiation or chemotherapy that they did not wish to receive? Why would we take away an individual's right to make decisions about what, when and how medication is administered to them? Why would we risk driving this vulnerable population further into hiding?

As an uninsured Vermonter I ask this additional question, who is responsible for the financial burden associated with an involuntary admission? Finances can be a stressful topic for even those individuals that do not struggle to maintain their mental health. By adding the fear of the possibility of a significant financial burden due to an involuntary admission to someone who is already is struggling is not helping them and the community around them, but hinders their willingness to seek treatment due to fear of the cost associated with an admission.

Please think about what impacts this legislation will have on mental health patients. I respectfully urge you to make the priority of this bill be the vulnerable patient.

Thank you and best wishes,  
Melissa Disorda