

From: Laura Ziegler

To: Members, Senate Judiciary Committee and Senate Health & Welfare Committee

Re: S.287

Someone I know who experienced non emergency involuntary medication at VSH is concerned about this bill and wants to give anonymous testimony. The following is taken from our phone conversations, and she has approved it in its entirety.

About being admitted to Fletcher Allen:

A relative called Howard saying I was suicidal and threatening to shoot people. I've never owned or had contact with guns. He'd been involuntarily hospitalized himself, the state took custody of his kids because he'd allegedly molested one of them, and he killed someone while drunk driving. They knew nothing about him, but assumed that he was credible and I wasn't.

I was brought to Fletcher Allen in handcuffs. The police officer signed something. I didn't. They still told me I was voluntary.

About an emergency injection at Fletcher Allen and admission to VSH:

I was conscious in a blurred state, like a zombie. My chest felt heavy and it felt like my heart was beating harder and slower. I couldn't get enough breath in my lungs. You don't know if you're going to stop breathing or fall -- all your defenses and protections are down 100%. After I got to VSH I didn't really wake up until the next day, didn't recall the admission process or evaluation or recognize the doctor who'd done the evaluation, because I was so drugged at the time. And how could she evaluate me in that state?

About non emergency forced drugging at VSH:

It blurred my vision so I could barely see. It slurred my speech. It was hard to talk and form words. It made me docile and zombie-like. It affected my mobility -- my body was heavy, my limbs were rigid and it was hard for me to walk or move around. Doing anything was a struggle. And I gained a lot of weight, quickly.

I wasn't myself any more. And I was really, really angry that I was being violated in such a way, and that my rights were being violated in such a way, really disturbed. I felt like I had been raped.

I couldn't read -- I had to keep rereading and rereading the same thing to try to grasp it mentally, and there were times when I couldn't absorb it at all.

They have everyone fill out a form that's supposed to be their individual plan for coping and anger management. I wrote: to go outside and breathe fresh air, to walk around, to read my Bible. After I was drugged I tried to pray and couldn't remember words, I'd forget what I was saying before I could finish forming a sentence. It made it so I couldn't even pray. How could I follow that part of my coping plan if I couldn't form a sentence?

I was very afraid that the drugs would damage me. I didn't want diabetes. I didn't want liver damage -- I've met people with that.

How can you infringe on someone's autonomy that way, and take that kind of control over someone else's body? It was **my** body, not theirs. I knew who the president was and the date and time and where I was and I knew myself and where I came from. I was competent to make my own decisions.

No matter what they do to me I'm always going to have the same thoughts, the same religion, the same politics and opinions. The more they violate my inalienable human rights the more I'm going to hang on to and express them and the hopes of exercising my rights in the future.

It's unconstitutional, it's unethical and it's immoral. Even if there is a court order it's assault and battery. There's no justifying it. Even if they're just doing their job they can't justify it.

To other people, it's OK if the doctor says so -- it's OK if the person carries this label. They don't grasp that anyone can get this label on them. My religious and spiritual and cultural beliefs were twisted around and used against me by the doctors.

In response to my asking how the experience affected her and if any of it was helpful:

Not one thing about involuntary hospitalization was helpful.

They were claiming I was suicidal. But I was concerned about my brain, my liver, my heart. I was concerned about my life. I was concerned about permanent side effects. Obviously I wanted to have a life -- without tardive dyskinesia and heart and liver damage and brain damage and drooling and the risk of death.

I knew the system. My father had a friend who was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and was at VSH and when I was 11 or 12 I would visit him on the units. So I was already aware of the drugs. My brother knew someone who suicided after being abused in VSH, he was vocal about it, and I knew about that since I was 12.

I've read my record so I know they didn't try to find anywhere to discharge me to. I was discharged when I found a place to go.

I still don't know why they said I was suicidal. Some doctors think you're incompetent because you don't think like them. And once the doctor gets ahold of hearsay it gets embellished and exaggerated and twisted. It's like the Miranda warning: Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. Even your tears can be used against you. Even remaining silent.

The experience affected me negatively. I view things differently. Everything that happens in my life, I have to first think about the hearsay and distortions and

inaccuracies in the psychiatric record, and how it could be used. I don't trust anyone and I can't talk about anything.

I'm afraid about speaking up because there's no justice. The constitution, pledging allegiance to the American flag, the government, where there's supposed to be justice and liberty -- it's a joke. There is no justice and no liberty.

I sent her a link to the bill. From her reply:

The very process of taking a person by force from their home or from the street or from anywhere, handcuffing/shackling them and manhandling them and denying them all their requests and then admitting them into an unfamiliar place full of strangers, while they're afraid of what's going to happen to them, or to their job, their housing, their children, is traumatizing and disorienting. They may be in shock for a long time after being admitted. And what's done to them in the hospital may traumatize them further. This is not therapeutic and is no way to treat people.

In response to Sec. Racine's recorded testimony, which I played over the phone:

"He has not been through it, obviously."

Reacting to his statement that "there are those who argue that [involuntary treatment and involuntary medication] should never be done at all and that's a philosophy and that's an argument that can be made", she said: "It's not a philosophy, it's inalienable human rights. And he's trying to force *his* philosophy onto other people, and that's unconstitutional."