

Good morning, Senator White, my representative and senators, and other legislators:

First, thank you. As a retired Vermont state employee, who also served on local boards, and who has followed government closely since retiring, I know how difficult serving all citizens as well and fairly as possible is. Second, this letter is in part a response to a suggestion from my representative, who met with me last year, and recommended closer work with legislative committees as a tool for greater success in understanding and working with government.

Third, this is one of my first steps following up on my own attendance at a free day long workshop at the VT Statehouse held by the Snelling Center, focused on citizen involvement with government. Two comments repeated during the day are relevant: There is a government expert on everything and citizens should find them. Audience members wanted to explore, understand and improve the gap between citizens and government. Fourth, and most important in this case, this is a letter of hope and desperation. The recent focus on mental health by the media and government brings hope. A struggle of at least 15 years to understand if mental illness has a hold on a close family member, the lack of resources I have found to help a family and the individual cope, together and with consistent positive results, are where my desperation is based.

The story on last night's news about legislative work to look at involuntary commitment, medication, and especially the testimony by Ms. Simpson, who described a manic episode, spoke to both hope and desperation. My family member may have bipolar disorder as well. It makes trust and continuity extremely difficult. Even family members not dealing with cyclical changes in perceived reality are made unsure and led in many directions by the effects of our beloved one's condition. Domestic abuse, perhaps at least in part caused by lack of mental health in others as well, have furthered the individual's fear and mistrust, of family and especially of government systems. None of us have found the government systems, including social and family services, non-profits intended to help, and law enforcement, related to our beloved's situation to have created a consistently helpful and healthier path. Our loved one is highly functioning, maintains home, work and parenting well - we think. But family and friend relationships are frequently, cyclically severed.

I beg you all, in every action you take, but especially when dealing with a person's mental health, to always put the citizen's welfare first, to try to build non-threatening ways to connect and reconnect fragile individuals and their families, to provide clear and valid information to help us as citizens better understand and help each other in our daily lives. I am definitely not asking for money or more government programs. I am asking for much more. I want government to find and provide tools to strength individuals outside of government, to make government truly more transparent and consistent, and always, always seeking to improve citizen lives not take freedoms away.

It has been hard to be brief and coherent in this, as it is so emotionally charged for me and my family. I hope I've succeeded at least a little. Thank you for your time.

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