

Anonymous  
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I want to submit the public comment anonymously. It is a copy of the e-mail that I sent to all the members of the Judiciary and Health and Welfare committees when I heard about bill S.287:

I just heard that bill S.287 "an act relating to involuntary commitment and medication hearings" is before the committees. just like with S.88 from three years ago and S.0137 from last year, this bill would be a disaster for the rights of Vermonters. I wrote in the protest those bills and once again I am writing to protest. Let me explain why.

The US Department of Justice found in 2005 that many patients at the Vermont State Hospital had been given inappropriate diagnoses. I was one of those patients. The psychiatrists insisted that I needed to be given powerful antipsychotic drugs because they claimed that I was delusional even though they had no solid proof that I was delusional. No one agreed to testify on my behalf at the involuntary medication hearing - no ward staff, no psychologist and no psychiatrist. In spite of that I won the medication hearing and the appeal which took another entire year. After that I was released with no conditions. I have never taken any of those awful drugs. If I had I might have been disabled by them. Instead I have been able to work full time and now have a job as an analytical chemist.

If the medication hearing had been held at the same time as my commitment hearing I certainly would have lost my case and been force drugged immediately. I would not have had any time to make my case that I did not need to be on antipsychotics. My commitment hearing was a farce. They began by arguing about committing me and then the judge said they had to go back and rule me incompetent first. By doing that I never got a chance to speak about the issue of my competence. I was not allowed to get a second opinion from another psychiatrist. I was locked up and did not have access to a telephone, so I could not gather evidence and find a good attorney. My public defender only spoke to be briefly a few days before the hearing. She never returned the calls I made to her afterward asking about the possibility of an appeal. This new bill would turn the hearings into even more of a farce by allowing hearsay testimony. And using a standard of substantial evidence to deprive people of their freedom is outrageous. There is a reason why 'beyond a reasonable doubt' is the standard used in criminal proceedings. Why is someone who is considered mentally ill not allowed to have as many rights as a person accused of committing a crime? If you really want to improve the mental health system you should be working to eliminate involuntary treatment, People are often afraid of asking for help or talking about their problems because they fear getting committed and drugged against their will.

I also want to add that psychiatrist are insensitive bullies who do not care about their patients. One at VSH even told me that she wanted to force drug me so she could not be sued if I harmed anyone. I had nearly the same discussion with another psychiatrist a year later. He was concerned that he was responsible for my behavior and he wanted me to take antipsychotics so that he would not be blamed if I harmed anyone. The longer I was incarcerated and the more lies they told to try to get me force drugged the angrier I got. In fact there were times when they seemed to be trying to provoke me into a reaction. Psychiatrists already have the tools they need to give medications to people. They are too lazy and incompetent to make good decisions so they want to force antipsychotics on almost anyone they see, in spite of the fact that those drugs have terrible and sometimes fatal side effects. That is why we need laws to protect ourselves from psychiatric malpractice. Why not propose a law that makes it easier to lock up psychiatrists who lie at hearings?

That is the end of the e-mail, but I would like to add more here.  
Why not take away the state's ability to appeal if they want to make the process faster? That's what cause my case to drag on so long. The appeal of my medication hearing took nearly a year. I also won a commitment hearing at one point about a year into my two year incarceration, but

that was reversed. The hospital was ordered to discharge me within 30 days, but within 2 weeks the state found another patient to testify that I wanted 'to get the creeps who had railroaded me." Another hearing was held and that was enough to get me recommitted for an entire YEAR. The state has all the advantages and this bill would give the state even more of an advantage.

I see the bill would not actually make the medication hearing at the same time as the commitment hearing, but it would still accelerate the process and that would have hurt my case. I talked to 9 psychiatrists during my two year incarceration and none of them agreed to testify that I did not need antipsychotics drugs. Since I had no doctor to testify on my behalf the only thing I had in my favor was the fact that I could be lucid and in control for a long period of time while not on antipsychotics.. This S.287 bill would take away that period of time that patients have to show that they don't need to be drugged. From Kevin Turnquist M.D. "Time is the biggest current obstacle to making good diagnoses. Psychiatric time is a scarce and expensive resource in our clinics and hospitals these days. There is no time for lengthy diagnostic interviews. Thirty minutes with a new patient is a luxury in some settings. The catch is that psychiatric diagnosis is based on a longitudinal perspective of the person's life and symptoms of mental illness. You need to know basic things like when the illness began, what symptoms have been characteristic, whether they were episodic or continuous, and if they were related to things like substance abuse or medical problems."

A better way to improve the system would be to reduce the need for hospitalizations by providing more voluntary community services. Why isn't anyone proposing bills that would do that?