

**Testimony re: S.88
Senate Health & Welfare Committee
March 22, 2011**

Sen. Ayer: Well they're welcome to come in, but I just want to tell the people in the room, we have now less than forty-five minutes for ten witnesses who wanted to speak. So I've asked Senator Fox to give you a little chime when you get a two minute warning, so you know it's time to wrap it up.

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Sen. Ayer: Thank you, Robert (Appel). Ah, going back to the top of the list, Xenia Williams?

Xenia Williams: Thank you.

Sen. Ayer: You're welcome, Ms. Williams. I know Robert knew, but we record all of our proceedings for the record. Just so you know.

Xenia Williams: Maybe you can have Senator Pollina pass these books out, which are -- this, this -- thanks. Um, he's my Senator. I'm Xenia Williams from Barre Town, Vermont. And thanks for hearing me.

Sen. Ayer: Are these for us, too?

Xenia Williams: Yes, they are.

Sen. Ayer: Would you like them returned?

Xenia Williams: No.

Sen. Ayer: Thank you very much.

Xenia Williams: They're for you to keep. And they have the facts, the statistics and the history. Individually, the young lady just behind you, Jenna, she's, the -- her situation is described in the beginning of Chapter 15, on page 313.

And this, this book lays out what I sort of knew, my own experience of being a real zombie on the drugs -- antipsychotics, for fourteen years. I slept sixteen hours a day. I couldn't think, I couldn't feel, beyond a little bit. I could work for eight hours every two weeks as a support worker for Southeast Mental Health. My recovery began from when I got off the drugs, and I was able to work full time. I worked for Southeast -- I worked for Washington County Mental Health, I got my Masters degree in community mental health, and I got my counseling license from the state -- actually, Nick Emlen there, I took over his case management load when I was a case manager for a year.

I found out at rights conferences and stuff that my experience of being a zombie on drugs, and recovering from the point that I got off them -- and I was lucky not to have a lot of withdrawal effects, which a lot of people do -- and very lucky not to get some of the permanent side effects -- it actually wasn't that uncommon. And -- but I never saw it systematically described until I was able to get ahold of

Robert Whitaker's book.

Sen. ____: That was your one minute.

Xenia Williams. O.K.

In my years in the system I was force drugged. And -- it, it felt like gang rape. It was retraumatizing. Like so many people in the mental health system I, I was subject to incest as a child. It's about abuse and psychological trauma, is about ninety-eight percent in people who are seriously involved with the mental health system. And I mostly worked in the crisis program of Washington County Mental Health. So we knew that there; we tried to avoid retraumatizing people. And we knew that people feeling helpless and feeling like veterinary patients was the thing that retarded their recovery, along with being overly sedated by the drugs. And I have for you, as a wrap up, a cartoon, that -- if you could send those around -- so, I guess I'm out of my two minutes. Thank you very much.

Sen. Ayer: Well, the whole process isn't over yet. Thank you for being so succinct. That's, ah, powerful.

The next person on the list is Ed Paquin.

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Sen. Ayer: Steven Morgan?

Steven Morgan: Hi. My name is Steven Morgan, I'm the director of Another Way. It's a peer support center for psychiatric survivors in Montpelier. I've also worked at the designated agency system -- I worked in southern Vermont in the mental health system there.

I can't cover what I want to cover in two or three minutes either. I usually talk about these kinds of issues at length in presentations I give that are at least three hours long. But I just want to make a couple general points. And I did bring a handout.

The first point is that, in terms of the expert witnesses on, on issues like these, people that have been force drugged, and people that have, have taken these medications against their will or been coerced to take them, that we're the expert witnesses on it. We can tell you the narrative, what's important, about what it does to our lives and what it feels like. The doctors that testify to it are looking for very different things than the things that, that, that we can talk about. I have seen lives ruined by this. I've had Haldol injected into me and had horrendous side effects from it. It was the worst period of my entire life. We've seen this over and over. Our constituencies are against this bill, and it's not because we lack insight into our illness, it's because we have something to say about what we want and about what these treatments do to us when, when, when things are forced upon us.

That aside -- the narrative that's being presented to you guys from NAMI and Tom Simpatico, I also want to say is, is a very, well in my view a very -- it's wrong. It's also a very complex and nuanced discussion. The idea that psychosis is toxic to your brain, and that therefore people need to take medications in order to, um, make their brains healthier, is a very flawed narrative that is not supported by the science.

This book goes into more detail than I can possibly give in the next sixty seconds. This man is also coming to speak April 7th at St. Michael's College at 7:00 p.m. I invite you to come to that, where he'll give you the two minute version of his book as well. But the point is, is that the evidence is not there. I'm happy to present -- I did write up some stuff. But I'm happy to, to, to give a more nuanced argument.

Um -- the, the -- what I do want to say is that instead what there is is that there's a lot of evidence saying that while some people do experience benefit from drugs, a large portion don't, and in fact are more harmed and become chronic mental

patients, basically, on disability and within the mental health system for life, as a result of, of the kind of effects that the medications can have. So.

Sen. Ayer: Thank you very much, Steven.

Sen. __: Thank you.

Sen. Ayer: Seth Collins?
O.K. Seth.

Seth Collins: O.K.
If S.88 passes, it --

Sen. Ayer: O.K., will you please say your name

Seth Collins: Oh yeah. My name is Seth Collins.
If S.88 passes, it will leave open the opportunity for many unforeseen and unintended consequences. People in general will feel a higher degree of fear and will avoid mental health care more. It will affect you and your families, and many people I know will be affected.
Most antipsychotics cause increased triglycerides in the blood and vastly increase the chances of developing diabetes. Someone I knew developed diabetes from Risperdal Consta. Like an earthquake, the repercussions of this bill will spread across Vermont, shattering lives.
And I'd like to give the remainder of my time to the next speaker.

Sen. Ayer: O.K. Thank you very much. Jenna Fogel?

Xenia Williams: Jenna could walk and talk perfectly well before she was put on all these drugs.

Sen. Ayer: Have a seat, Jenna. Just say your name for the record, please.

Jenna Fogel: Hi. I'm Jenna Fogel. I don't really know what to say; I come very unprepared. But, I, as along of many of my, people I've known, have ben force medicated and, um, the side effects aren't fun to live with. So, in passing this bill, it would only hurt more people. Like it's hurt me, you know? O.K.

Sen. Ayer: Thank you very much.

Jenna Fogel: You're welcome.

Sen. __: Thank you.

Xenia Williams: As I mentioned, page 313 describes Jenna's situation in more detail.

Sen. Ayer: I have that marked.

