

Dear Ms. Wilson:

I wish to submit testimony re: S.141.

Dear Representatives of the House Judiciary Committee:

As an emergency physician practicing in southwestern Vermont, I wish to inform you that medical noncompliance is common among patients with major mental illness, especially if the individual also abuses alcohol and/or illicit substances. Noncompliance with therapy results in relapses of dysfunctional and dangerous behaviors, and I regularly evaluate and treat such patients in the emergency department. (To wit: of the three psychiatric patients I evaluated last night in Bennington, one had been hospitalized within the past three weeks, and a second had been hospitalized within the past six months.)

Waiting periods for restoration of firearm privileges afford providers and other stakeholders the information necessary to be confident that the person is unlikely to relapse to an unstable and dangerous condition.

Multiple studies have demonstrated that patients are at greater risk of self-directed violence/suicide in the time period following hospital discharge. Additional studies have demonstrated an increased risk of interpersonal violence after discharge, with the risk being greatest within the first six months.

In one study, 17.9% of patients with a major mental disorder demonstrated repeat violent behavior within 1 year of hospital discharge; 31.1 % with major mental disorder and substance abuse demonstrated repeat violent behavior, and; 43% with another form of mental disorder (e.g., affective disorder) and substance abuse had repeat violent behavior within one year. (Steadman H., Mulvey E., et al., Violence by people discharged from acute psychiatric inpatient facilities and by others in the same neighborhood. *Arch Gen Psych*, 1998;55(5), 393-401)

A second study demonstrated that 63% of patients with a history of violence and who were noncompliant with therapy had repeat violent behavior within one year; that number decreased to 37.5% when such patients were compliant. (Swanson J., Swartz M, et al., Involuntary outpatient commitment and reduction of violent behavior in persons with severe mental illness. *Brit J Psych*, 2000;176(4), 324-331)

An adequate waiting period for restoration of firearm privileges is essential to prospectively observe an individual's behavior after discharge from hospital, and to confirm that the person in question remains compliant with therapy - and thereby stable from a psychiatric/medical perspective. Regional standards

for waiting periods is 5 years; in my professional opinion, waiting periods less than 18 months impose unnecessary risk to individual and public health.

Thank you and best regards,
Christopher Barsotti MD FAAEM
Bennington, Vermont

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