

Testimony Against HB 2594

House Judiciary Committee  
February 21, 2013

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Board of Directors  
Mental Health America of Oregon

Chair Barker, Members of the Committee:

As a person who has many years of personal lived experience of mental illness and hospitalizations, I am testifying on behalf of Mental Health America of Oregon which is an advocacy organization for persons who have mental health challenges.

It is compassionate to seek to care for citizens that are experiencing serious mental health challenges.

However, we must be careful not to create legislation that does not erode civil rights or that reinforces the pejorative stereotypes which burden our society and frequently cause suffering individuals to shun care.

Civil commitment is one juncture in time and we must not isolate it at the expense of addressing all the other aspects that surround it. For instance, by the option of more peer services and wraparound approach, we can sometimes not need commitment.

Line 21 needs to be more specific in what the time frame is for suffering harm. Also it should more explicitly state how a "reasonable probability" is determined. This is too vague.

On line 24, I would be careful not to use noncompliance with treatment as grounds for commitment. The unfortunate truth is that there are sometimes very good reasons that an individual does not comply with treatment. An example is when prescribed medications that cause side-effects that make it difficult for a person to have good quality of life and which cause serious other medical conditions such as diabetes or with names like akathisia, prolactinemia, and pseudoparkinsonism.

In Section 3, we object to the use of the "mental retardation" as insulting and unskillful. This term needs to be stricken from our state's vocabulary.

Yes, we need to take better care of our mentally ill. But we must also protect civil rights and individuals' personal choices, not adding to the societal stigma and discrimination towards persons with mental illness that hurts us all. We need a careful balance.

Thank you.  
Meghan Caughey