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Testimony HB 4074

At 50 years old my fabulous mother was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. None of us understood what that really meant and the importance of daily medication that she would need for the rest of her life. She was hospitalized multiple times, ultimately started medication, and returned to her normal self.

Later, she moved to the Oregon Coast where a psychiatric nurse practitioner said "You don't need all this medication. You seem fine!" Because of the stigma surrounding anti-psychotic medication, my mom was thrilled and immediately stopped taking it. That triggered a horrific years-long spiral into psychosis. She was in and out of the hospital, but because she wasn't waving a gun around or threatening to kill herself, they always released her within 24 hours to 2 weeks. She wrote her name on her walls in blood, set a fire on her balcony, and threw all of her furniture out of a third story window, but by the time she made it to the hospital, they'd say they had no reason to keep her. The last time, I begged the doctor to keep her in tears. He said there was nothing he could do.

The final time I tried to get her help, she ran away from social workers in Los Angeles and took off in her car. She ended up in jail in Oregon, then missing and homeless for 6 months.

But we are the lucky ones because, miraculously, a kind man recognized her from a missing poster in Portland. My brother and I ultimately found her sleeping in a doorway of a luxury condo on Hawthorne. It was November, her hair was all matted up, she was sick, coughing, and even then she didn't want help.

One final time, I called a crisis team and incredibly everything fell into place. The social workers were smart and effective, the police officers were kind and well-trained.

Because she looked so bad, and we encountered the right people, they took her to the hospital and we got a commitment hearing. But even then it was a long shot. The lawyer said the judge only grants involuntary commitments to 1 in 10 people. My whole family flew in to testify.

After a long day of pleading our case, the judge saw her dire condition and ruled to send her to the Oregon State Hospital for 6 months. It was one of the happiest days of my life.

At first, she hated it, and I was picturing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. But, as time went on, she started to like it. She made friends, and my mom, the real her, started to return, the delusions stopped. After four months she was ready to leave early. The hospital set her up with supportive housing and she was given her life back.

Since then we've had our ups and downs, but that hospital stay and dedication to medication changed the trajectory of all of our lives. Today she's my three year old daughter's favorite person in the world.

My mom and my family suffered for years because the criteria to help someone long term is so blurry and draconian. People talk about protecting civil liberties, but allowing someone to languish in the street screaming because they think the FBI is following them is not protecting their civil rights. We must provide quality healthcare to our most vulnerable so they can recover and regain their lives and live fully as themselves, just like my mom. Thank you.