

ADDRESS TO HOUSE CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Chairman Lang, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Member Leland, and Members of the Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on House Bill 136. I come before you to express my full and strong support for House Bill 136 because it would ban the execution the severely mentally ill which includes bipolar disorder. My name is Peter McGrover and I live in Cincinnati, Ohio. I was a professional social worker for 10 years from 1990 to 2000 before I suffered from major mental illness. I have a Bachelor and Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Cincinnati: a proud Bearcat. I was also a licensed social worker and chemical dependency counselor for over 20 years in the State of Ohio. My father was a veteran of the United States Marine Corp who passed away recently who was honorably discharged with the rank of captain.

My first symptoms of mental illness started 3 months after receiving my MSW in September of 1996, while working as a Regional Substance Abuse Specialist with the Ohio Department of Youth Services. I became extremely depressed. It hit me from out of nowhere with no warning at all. I felt like I was in this deep dark

hole. I would describe it like a deep dark abyss with no end in sight. Over the next four years my depression rapidly accelerated especially after I resigned from the VA Medical Center in Dayton, Ohio as a social worker working on the Inpatient Psychiatric Unit in November of 1999. By the time I was first hospitalized in June of 2000, I was severely and extremely depressed. Suicidal. I had a plan to end my life. Distressed, distraught with feelings of extreme mental pain and anguish. I have never felt such mental pain and anguish in my life. I felt like a house that had been flattened by a tornado, ripped from limb to limb, torn apart.

I remember when I was in the emergency room at Good Samaritan Hospital. I was shaking and sobbing so violently that they had to give me Ativan to calm me down physically and emotionally.

There have been two key turning points in my life that have led me to fully accept the fact that I have a major mental illness and I am bi-polar. I was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder while hospitalized in May of 2009 at Summit Behavioral after several arrests. My initial diagnosis at Good Samaritan Hospital in June of 2000 was Major Depressive Disorder. Acceptance of my mental illness and bi-polar disorder has been a difficult process for me in general.

The first key turning point/event in my life was my walk with my friend, Bob, in April of 2010. That particular night I was extremely manic. I was talking very fast, very loud, and not-stop throughout the walk. I was very agitated and had a high level of energy that night. After my walk with Bob he said to me: Peter, I've got a headache. I've got to lay down and you need to go home. I will never forget the tone of his voice. I sat in my car for about 5 to 10 minutes and added it all up – the results/consequences of my mental illness:

1. Six arrests
2. Homeless at one point in my life
3. Six inpatient hospitalizations
4. Selling my car and giving away just about all of my possessions to the Saint Vincent DePaul Society which assists the poor thinking I would be the next St. Francis of Assisi in the Catholic Church. Grandiose thinking.

The Second event/turning point – Peer to Peer Course, which I took then volunteered while assisting the other facilitators. This course is a 10 week education course for those who are mentally ill. The sentence that changed my life forever was the following: “Our

brains got sick.” I said to myself – it is not my fault I got so ill and sick. I finally stopped blaming myself for my illness which I am not responsible for. I did not ask for this or choose this. These four words released a tremendous amount of guilt and shame I had placed upon myself for many years. I finally stopped asking myself – How and why did I get so sick? One of the greatest myths about mental illness is that people choose, ask, or want to be mentally ill. I know from both professional and personal experience that this is simply not true. My hope is that by sharing my story today, before this committee, I have helped to greatly reduce the shame and stigma associated with mental illness, since one in five have some form of major mental illness. I could be one of those people on death row. This is a major reason why I fully support House Bill 136. I will be happy to answer any questions at this time.