

Testimony by Bradley Tarr
on H.B. 249
October 31, 2023

Good afternoon, my name is Bradley Tarr, I am 30 years old, and I reside in Lexington, Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of H.B. 249.

I would like to tell you a bit about my experience with mental illness so you can better understand why I support this bill. When I was 11, I was diagnosed with mental illness. From age 11 - 26, I was in and out of hospitals well over 20 times.

When I was in the fourth grade, I went through a major suicidal depressive season. I was eventually sent to Akron Children's Hospital for 2 weeks and was placed on medication. My diagnosis was "chronic depression."

While I was in high school, I was virtually a boomerang. I was in and out of the hospital so many times I lost count. Sometimes my symptoms could be triggered by a sports season, by a big test, or by a girlfriend breaking up with me. I experienced suicidal depression, insomnia, brain hypertension, paranoia, and severe manic symptoms. During this time, my psychiatrist was changed several times over, and each doctor would radically change which meds I was on. One particular medicine gave me such a side effect of rage that I ended up randomly punching several holes in my mom's cabinets and walls.

In my sophomore year, there was even a social media hate group created entitled, "I Survived the Wrath of Brad Tarr." It was a page dedicated to humiliating me, attempting to ruin my reputation, to fan the flames of rumors about my supposed behavior and intentions, and to caricaturing my Christian faith. Fortunately, my principal had it taken down quickly. My diagnoses during that period was "bipolar disorder" and "unspecified mood disorder."

Four years later, while I was away at college, my symptoms flared up again. I had gone three days without sleep, was having angry outbursts over relatively small and inconsequential matters and was behaving in a very paranoid manner. I was pacing around campus anxiously, talking to myself. I ended up spending 14 days in a New England hospital and was sent home.

Within 4 weeks of being home, my symptoms began scaring my mother. She would lock her bedroom door at night for fear my delusions or hallucinations would flare up and I would hurt her. I was illogical, I was unreasonable, and my grasp on reality was tenuous at best. She was unable to continue sharing an apartment with me. I had to get out. It was winter, and I was homeless. I was estranged from family because none of them knew how to cope with me, not even my siblings. I eventually ended up in a homeless shelter.

I was there for about a month, in small quarters, that were crowded and cramped, with about a

dozen or so people, many of whom were far sicker than even I was. After several days of being verbally threatened and bullied by others -- at one point a schizophrenic man loudly threatened to slit my throat open -- I reared back and punched a hole in the wall of the shelter. This landed me in trouble with the law and I was placed on probation for 14 months. I was happy when I graduated from the program. It was one of the most trying ordeals of my life.

Two years later, I again was super symptomatic; the worst of my entire life, in fact. From February - May of 2019, I was hospitalized five times. I was depressed, then manic, then depressed again. I had severe bouts of insomnia, paranoia, delusions, severe headaches. I had visual, auditory, and olfactory hallucinations. My delusions would vary. At one point I thought I was the Director of the NSA. Another time, I was the Secretary of Defense. I saw all things around me as a coded message from the government. For 2 weeks I was a 007 agent. I thought that I was encountering MI-6 agents almost everywhere I went. They were even dispersed and scattered throughout the crowd during Mass at Church.

Eventually, I was hospitalized again. After I was discharged, I was placed in the Richland County Assisted Outpatient Treatment program. AOT is a collaboration between civil courts and the mental health system and is intended for those who are caught in the revolving door of hospitalization, homelessness and incarceration. It was through this program that I finally received the help, support and encouragement I so desperately needed. I will forever be grateful to Probate Court Judge Mayer and the mental health team at Catalyst Life Services for helping me to turn my life around.

I tell you all this, because I think it is important for you to understand that I know what it is like to have your life spiral out of control due to mental illness and not have the ability to stop it from crashing to the floor. I lost everything, my family, my home, and my liberty. Fortunately, through AOT, I have all those things back, but it was a long and difficult journey to get where I am today.

H.B. 249 makes it possible for those who know me, who know when I am in real trouble, to see that I get the help I need *before* I frighten the people I love most in the world, *before* I lose the gains I have worked so hard to achieve, and *before* I land back out on the street in the dead of winter.

I urge you to please support H.B. 249.