

May 19, 2024

To Chairman Pavliga, Ranking Member Brewer, and members of the House Behavioral Health Committee:

My name is Susan Koller. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts on House Bill 249 through written testimony. This bill is very personal to me because I was diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) when I was 15. More than 25 years later, I am still struggling to cope with both these disorders on a daily basis.

Over the years, I have sought various treatments for both disorders. These treatments include support groups, medications prescribed by psychiatrists, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) with licensed social workers and psychologists, and enrollment in an Intensive Outpatient Therapy Program (IOP). No matter what form of treatment I chose, two very important aspects of my treatments have always remained the same for me – I chose of treatment I wanted and had an active say in how that treatment was conducted. These two aspects of my treatment still hold true for me today. That is why it is very troubling to me that this bill expands the criteria for involuntary commitment to include psychiatric deterioration. In my opinion, involuntary commitment means the patient is no longer in charge of their treatment or their life. I know from personal experience that when I do not feel in charge of my own life my disorders get worse, not better. That is why I am in favor of expanding community-based and person-centered mental health treatment programs rather than expanding the criteria for involuntary commitment.

It is imperative that mental health treatment be person-centered at the very core because only the individual receiving treatment knows if that treatment is working for them. I once was treated by a psychiatrist who asked me to stop taking a certain medication before I even started treatment because the psychiatrist thought this medication harmed everyone who took it. I do not know all the side effects of this medication, but I do know my mental health deteriorated significantly when I went off the medication cold turkey. My mental health deteriorated so much that another psychiatrist put me back on the medication. I am now on a higher dose than I was when I started taking the medication.

While I have never been institutionalized because of my mental health disorders, I have been institutionalized. I have a severe physical disability that requires another person to do all my activities of daily living for me. I briefly moved into a nursing home when I could not find any home healthcare workers to help my mom care for me. Moving into an institutionalized environment from a community setting made me feel like I had moved to another planet because the environment was so completely different from everything I knew. It was my choice to move into the nursing home. I cannot even begin to imagine what it would feel like if I moved into an institutional environment that was so different from everything I had ever known against my will. Dealing with, and recovering from mental health issues is difficult enough. I implore all legislators not to make individuals situations more difficult by forcing them into a very uncomfortable and completely foreign environment that is away from the support of people they desperately need.

The last point I want to talk about regarding this bill is the fact that I believe involuntary commitment increases the stigma around mental health disorders and treatment. Make no mistake the stigma surrounding mental health disorders and treatment is very real. I should have sought treatment for my

mental health disorders sooner, but I was scared this would make me weak and scared of what other people would think. I was mostly worried about what other people would think if they knew I was seeing a mental health professional and taking medication. In my opinion, seeing a mental health professional and taking medication seems small in comparison to being involuntarily committed. I cannot imagine having to deal with the stigma of being involuntarily committed.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to submit written testimony on this important bill. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

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