

Lt. Governor Calley and Members of the Mental Health and Wellness Commission

I am pleased to see that Michigan is taking steps to evaluate our state Mental Health System. My oldest step-son is Developmentally Disabled and Mentally Ill, duly diagnosed. A diagnosis that at one time was not even recognized by the State of Michigan. When he was an adolescent he was fairly easy to handle and attended a special school that fit his needs fairly well. Upon entering his teens through his late 20's he went through delayed puberty and was very difficult to manage. We formed a parent group with other parents who had children that were duly diagnosed and eventually Oakland County contracted for a group home for these folks. The aim was for behavior modification to see if they could be mainstreamed into jobs and group homes. Unfortunately, this one home was closed in the late 80's and another has never replaced it as far as I know. Further only one independent living facility for the DD & MI population was built at 12 Mile & Pierce in Southfield, Michigan only 8 people can be housed there.

Our parent group testified in Lansing and Oakland County about issue that concerned our children. We were the fight team for group homes and mainstreaming. We wanted our children to lead as normal a life as possible and become all that they could be, given their disability. Now 30 years later I believe many have done better than an institutional setting could ever have offered them. The sad reality is that many times for a brief period of time my step-son has been hospitalized. These hospitalizations have all occurred for one reason; the right to refuse his medication.

This is an area I hope that your committee will concentrate on and suggest legislation to correct. In Michigan if you are over 18 you are considered an adult. We cannot consider chronological age when we are dealing with the Mentally Ill and the Developmentally Disabled. They may have the body of an adult but they are emotionally and mentally much younger and unable to make sure critical decisions such as refusals of necessary medication. While we all desire the "least restrictive environment" for our loved ones the reality is that there are times when it is necessary to medicate by any means necessary. Unfortunately many of our mentally ill end up, in our jails. Shame on us as a society if this is the best answer we can offer. I believe the single change to recognize that an unstable person is not capable of making their own medical decisions would go a long way in helping the MI & DD population and their care givers.

I know we can do better and our mental health code needs to be updated and recognize that a parent, sibling or guardian should have the authority to work with health professionals and social workers to achieve the best possible situation for the individual.

My late husband and I had to sue for medical, guardianship to assure that our son took his meds; no parent should have to worry about their adult child. But many lose sleep every night wondering when they will get the next call that their son or daughter is on the street or in jail because they didn't take the necessary medication. You shouldn't have to sue the state or county to insure proper care for someone who isn't in control when not on meds. Medication should not be a decision given to people incapable of making rational decisions. It is as necessary as giving a child with diabetes their insulin! Don't judge my son by his 6'1" body, but by his 4 year old mind, because that is the person who refuses his meds.

There are many other issues such as hospitalization, temporary institutionalization that should be addressed when rewriting any Mental Health Legislation. I hope you will consider a complete overhaul of the system.

Respectfully,

**Linda Jolicoeur**