

April 3, 2015

TO: Representative Mitch Greenlick, Chair
House Health Care Committee
FR: Michael Hlebechuk
RE: HB 3347

I am providing this testimony in opposition to House Bill 3347. This bill will create more problems than it will solve. Oregon's existing civil commitment laws currently provide a workable path to civil commitment. Lowering the bar to civil commitment will result in needless hospitalizations and a greater loss of civil rights for a sizable swath of individuals.

I have been civilly committed three times; the first time in 1979 and the last time in 1991. In the course of 19 years, I was hospitalized 20 times, seven of which *were in state hospital settings. I have been diagnosed with paranoid type schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bi-polar disorder, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.*

My symptoms resulted from a traumatic event when I was fifteen years of age. Had this trauma been addressed with treatments that are available today, I doubt I would have needed to be hospitalized even once.

It took me over a year to get my life back on track following my first state hospitalization in 1979. I felt like an anathema following that hospitalization. My self-esteem was at an all time low. I felt like the scourge of the earth, and I became more systematic as a result.

This all changed in 1987 when I was elected the first President of the Board of Mind Empowered, Inc., the first publically-funded mental health consumer run agency in Oregon. I learned from my fellow board members that I did not need to live by the dictates of a treatment plan written by a case manager who really did not know me. I could take the reins of my life, make my own decisions, and become a responsible adult. As I took control of my life, my life improved. As my

life improved, I was more thoughtful with the decision I made since I had more to gain and more to lose. My mental health recovery had begun.

I had been hospitalized 17 times from 1976 to 1987, when I got involved with Mind Empowered. I have been hospitalized three times since 1987, the last time occurring shortly after being married in 1998. If you have been married, you might understand how this could happen.

In 1991, I had an extremely powerful mania. Manic episodes of this magnitude had landed me in hospitals in the past. This time, however, I elected to go to Mind Empowered. Though I had been President of the Board there for over three of the last four years, this was the first time I sought out its services.

My experiences at Mind Empowered during this episode were different than at any other point in my mental health history. I recall telling someone there that I was an archangel. My name is Michael, after all. "What makes you so special?" I was asked. "There are two other archangels over there, and that guy, well, he is God." That was a change. I ended up focusing my attention on the fellow who thought he was God, and stopped focusing so much on myself. In less than three weeks time, I reconstituted. What normally would have been a six month episode was resolved in less than a month.

I went off of medications in 1999 while employed in an entry level position at Fred Meyer. Within the next two years, I was directing a statewide organization that provided technical assistance to mental health consumer-run organizations. I have been continuously employed since 1999; in fairly high-level positions since 2001.

I tell you all of this to put into perspective what helps and what hinders mental health recovery. Being hospitalized against my will was devastating. I viewed *myself as someone not acceptable to society. Conversely, having meaningful community supports, such as those I found at Mind Empowered, played a crucial role in my recovery.*

The estimated fiscal impact of HB 3347 has not yet been produced, but it will likely cost the state tens of millions of dollars per fiscal. Instead of being used to

rob increasing numbers of people of their right to liberty and creating a huge barrier to their mental health recovery, these dollars could far better be used to improve supports in the community, like Mind Empowered, to promote the mental health recovery of the people the system is in place to serve. I urge you to cast your vote for mental health recovery. I urge you to reject this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

