

Submitter: Denise Darby
On Behalf Of:
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Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2467

My name is Denise Darby. My son is alive today only because he was hospitalized through the involuntary commitment process. That process was extremely difficult, and it was only through sheer luck that I or someone else wasn't killed while he deteriorated.

My son has bipolar disorder and didn't experience psychosis until he was in his 40s. When in treatment, he was happily married with a family and ran a successful business. Because he wasn't able to fully recognize his illness, he decided to stop his medication and went into psychosis. Over a period of 6 months, he devolved to the point he was stalking strangers he believed to be satanic and acting threateningly to his family and others. Every day I expected a devastating phone call that he had hurt someone, or he was dead.

His wife had been in contact with the local chapter of NAMI and the county sheriff's office for several months but was told nothing could be done until he was a serious danger to himself or others. When he finally met that threshold, he was arrested instead of hospitalized. His story highlights how the state's outdated law is leading to criminalization and harm.

One day while I was visiting his house, my son held a tire iron to my throat. He believed I was a satanic imposter, not his real mom. His wife was able to convince him to release me and we both realized he had finally met that threshold of dangerousness. I realize now that all three of our lives were in danger that day. After that incident, a deputy finally came to transport him to the hospital.

But in his psychosis, my son ran from the officer – and fought back. Rather than taking him to the hospital, the deputy charged him with assault and took him to jail. Over that weekend, my son's wife and I contacted the jail, advocating for him to be diverted into the civil court system for evaluation and hospitalization.

Although my son had nearly killed me days earlier and still had not received any mental health treatment, the judge ordered him to be released. Our family was terrified. Staff at the jail, thankfully, ensured that he was evaluated for a civil commitment, which was upheld, and he was transported directly from the jail into a secure hospital setting.

He was in treatment for about 5 weeks, where he received the needed medication to bring him out of his psychosis. For over 2 years now my son has been stable, living

with his family and running his business.

We are the lucky ones. I am one of the few in our advocacy group whose child is still alive. I live in fear of another episode. It should not have to be so hard to get the needed help for our loved ones with severe mental illness before there is a tragedy.