

Submitter: Heidi Hayward
On Behalf Of:
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My name is Heidi Hayward. My mom began having delusions at 50 years old. The first time, she called me from LAX to say FBI helicopters were following her and that her beloved brother was on his way to rescue her and take her to Hawaii. Of course, he never showed up. Instead, I learned what it's like to try to help someone living with severe mental illness.

She was in and out of the hospital for 7 years, always released within 24 hours to 2 weeks, no matter how bad the circumstances. During these incidents she wrote her name on the walls of her apartment in blood, set a fire on her apartment balcony, and threw all of her furniture out of a third story window. My mom, like many living with a mental illness, is wildly intelligent and knew how to pretend everything was fine by the time she got to the hospital.

In 2016, she ended up in jail in Newport for suspected DUI after an illegal U-turn. I explained it wasn't drugs or alcohol, it was mental illness and begged them to take her to the hospital, but they kept her in jail. By the time got there, they had released her, completely out of her mind. She couldn't afford to get her car out of the impound lot, so with no other options, she started walking on highway 101, homeless, and delusional.

For 6 months our family searched for her. We had no idea if she was even alive. In November, as temperatures dipped below freezing, a kind man recognized her from a missing poster in Portland. She had hitchhiked there from the coast. My brother and I ultimately found her asleep in the doorway of a luxury condo on Hawthorne with nothing but a little piece of cardboard for a bed and a thin robe for a coat. Her hair was all matted up, she had a terrible cough, and even then refused help, saying she was going to "head north and walk over the pass."

One final time, with almost all hope gone, I called a crisis team, and incredibly everything fell into place. Because she looked so bad, and we encountered the right people, they took her to the hospital and we got a commitment hearing. My whole family flew in to testify.

The judge saw her dire condition and sent her to the Oregon State Hospital for 6 months.

At first she hated it, but as time went on, my mom, the real her, started to come back. After 4 months she fully recovered and was ready to leave early. The hospital set her

up with supportive housing and she got her life back.

That four month hospital stay and dedication to medication changed the trajectory of all of our lives. Today, my mom lives independently in a lovely apartment and is my four-year-old daughter's favorite person in the world.

My mom and our family suffered unnecessarily for years because the criteria to help someone long-term is so blurry and draconian. People talk about protecting civil liberties, but allowing someone to languish in the street is not protecting their civil rights. We must make it easier to provide quality long-term healthcare to our most vulnerable so that they can recover and reclaim their lives, just like my mom. Thank you.