

Submitter:

Mary Jo Mann

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Judiciary

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB2467

My brother was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was in his early twenties. He was unable to complete his promising studies at college and eventually ended up at the Oregon State Hospital. With treatment and aftercare with a psychiatrist, and with the support of his family and a county case worker, he was able to achieve a period of relative stability.

Over time he had slipped back into a state of poor mental health. He had stopped taking his medication which kept him stable. My aging parents managed to have him in their home despite times of verbal abuse and physical threats. Myself, my parents and two other siblings spent years trying to get him the help he so desperately needed. It was impossible to get him to seek treatment because he did not believe he needed help. When trying to get him assistance we heard over and over that the criteria for involuntary treatment required that he be an imminent threat to himself or others. We believed that he was a danger behind the wheel of a car and to our elderly parents, as well as to himself. He was unable to care for himself. Without the extreme sacrifice of my parents, we would have probably been out on the street.

It would take a crisis for him to get treatment. After many years, and much trauma and stress for the entire family, he threatened my elderly mother and he was arrested and spent a brief time in jail. With the help of a good lawyer who steered him toward treatment and away from criminal court, he was moved once again to the state hospital. It took a while to stabilize him and get him back on his medication, but eventually, he was released and was able to come back home.

Current state law requires evidence of danger at such a high standard that it's not met until someone is harmed. I believe this is the reason why we have so many mentally ill individuals on our streets. This standard makes it almost impossible to get help for a loved one before a tragedy occurs.

I believe that we need to treat mental illness like we do physical illness. I support this legislation which begins to move our state in the direction to decriminalize mental illness.

Please support SB 2467 and its amendment. Please pass this important legislation.

Thank you.