

To whom it may concern:

I would like to testify at the July 24 hearing in Bridgeport, PA concerning my experience dealing with the present involuntary commitment laws.

My son, present age 44, has been suffering from schizophrenia for the past 19 years. During most of that time, he lived with me. He has no insight into his illness and has been occasionally non-compliant with medication, resulting in 30 relapses in the past 19 years. During his relapses, he would disappear from home and usually turn up walking in traffic, resulting in involuntary hospital commitments. Whenever I sensed that he was spiraling down to a relapse, my efforts to prevent him from leaving the house were usually futile. On March 31, 1999, I realized that he was clearly having a relapse. I attempted to have him involuntarily hospitalized through the Crises procedure. My petition was turned down because it was deemed not strong enough. Early the following day, my son left the house and was hit by a truck a couple of blocks from the house. He sustained a broken femor (thigh bone), a broken arm, and an 8 inch head laceration.

According to the present rules for petitioning for involuntary hospital commitment, the qualifying behavior must have been observed in the previous 30 days. Medical history beyond 30 days is not allowed to be included in the petition. This time restriction must be eliminated. The person who turned down the petition did not know my son's medical history. Information from families who are caring for their ill members should be welcomed.

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