

PUBLIC HEARINGS ON PA HOUSE BILL 2374

Wednesday, July 24, 2002, 9:00 AM

Judiciary Committee
Task Force On Forensic Sciences Law
Borough Hall
Council Chambers
4th & Mills Streets
Bridgeport, PA

To Whom It May Concern:

I almost lost one of the most precious members of my family. Having been diagnosed with a brain disease known as schizoaffective disorder, my daughter struggled for years taking medications that she was certain were unnecessary. Finally, in the late fall of 1998, she stopped taking the antipsychotic that kept her delusions and hallucinations at bay. For the next year and a half, I watched helplessly as my daughter was hospitalized fourteen times. After each release, she would emphatically state that she would remain on the medications prescribed. However, since she had a total lack of insight into her illness, time and time again my daughter would discontinue the medications and deteriorate to a level that would allow her to be committed into the hospital because she was a "danger to herself or a danger to others." There was no recourse, not intervention, only the horror and heartache I felt as I watched the inevitable psychosis return and the fear and worry that something very serious would happen to my daughter. After the first few hospitalizations, I found myself wishing that she would decompensate quickly and reach the state of "danger to self or others" that would finally enable her to get the help she so desperately needed. After twelve hospitalizations, in utter frustration and depression, my daughter stood in traffic, with the intent of killing herself. Fearful that she would again discontinue her medications, the county mental health agency decided that she should be sent to the state mental hospital where she spent the next fifteen months of her life.

If only an assisted treatment law existed, my daughter could have been spared all of the misery she experienced and she would not have lost the last four years of her life which was interrupted by constant hospitalizations. My daughter truly lacked the capacity to make a rational decision regarding her treatment during those years. It is time to enact PA House Bill 2374 to ensure more humane, medically sound treatment for the most vulnerable in our society. Without this measure, the needless waste of life will continue and all those who had the opportunity to correct this injustice will be held responsible.

Jeanette M. Castello