

February 18, 2020

HB 607 - SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary, and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Thank you very much for hearing my testimony today. I am Stacie Votaw and I am here to share my experience with you about what occurs during an episode of psychosis and how transformative it can be to have a trained officer help de-escalate a situation and recognize that someone is not committing a crime but that they're in need of urgent medical attention.

Summary of what psychosis is like

My experience with mental illness is rooted in a nightmare... and I don't use that word lightly. If you can imagine living in a nightmare, that's what psychosis was like for me. I believed I had discovered I was part of a government secret agent program. I believed that I was being watched at all times. I also believed that I was delivered a constant stream of secret messages embedded in subtle conversations with strangers, the imagery on TV and print ads, and coded into the English language itself.

It was this experience with messages embedded into television images that propelled me into an inspiring and benevolent experience with an empathetic police officer.

The backdrop for interaction with the police officer

During an afternoon when I was particularly upset about my paranoid delusions, my boyfriend took me out for lunch. During this lunch, I began noticing messages delivered through the restaurant's television that was mounted above the bar.

Infuriated at the idea the government was interfering in my life, I lashed out at my boyfriend whom I believed to be a secret agent and launched a full margarita at him across the table. I jumped up from the table and ran through the restaurant out the back door.

Outside of the restaurant, I began screaming at people to call the police with my boyfriend trying to chase and calm me down.

Interaction with the police officer

Once the police officer arrived, he split my boyfriend and me up. My boyfriend took his time to explain my condition to him, that I was having a mental breakdown.

During my time with the officer, convinced he a secret agent, I wanted to be separated from my boyfriend and began asking, "what do I have to do to get arrested?" My boyfriend interjected saying, "don't tell her because she will do it."

After this exchange, my rage finally grew out of control with an attempt to punch the officer in the face. Thinking quickly and professionally, the officer maneuvered me into a confined hold on the back of the police car and quickly ushered me into the back once secured in handcuffs.

Police officer's response and how it helped and affects me to this day

Rather than immediately transporting me to the nearest jail, which he was surely within his rights and the law to do, he returned to my boyfriend to learn more about my condition. He decided to take me to the nearest hospital.

This police officer was truly a lifesaver. Conditions could have been made far worse for me at his discretion. Foregoing incarceration, devastating fines, felony charges, and restricting access to psychiatric counseling and medication, he opted not to take me to jail.

I am thankful for this police officer's patience and empathy. It is because of his kindness that I am able to stand and tell you this amazing story today and not sitting behind the bars with the other inmates for which you currently care.

Stacie Votaw

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