

Favorable: HB 576

Bradley Tarr- AOT graduate

Lexington, Ohio

Good afternoon, my name is Bradley Tarr, I am 30 years old, and I reside in Lexington, Ohio. Thank you for taking time to read my testimony today, in support of HB 576.

I would like to tell you a bit about my experience with mental illness so you can better understand why I support this bill. When I was 11, I was diagnosed with mental illness. From age 11-26, I was in and out of hospitals well over 20 times.

When I was in fourth grade, I went through a major suicidal depressive season. I was eventually sent to Akron Children's Hospital for 2 weeks and was placed on medication. My diagnosis was "Chronic Depression."

While I was in High School, I was virtually a boomerang. I was in and out of the hospital so many times I lost count. Sometimes my symptoms could be triggered by a sports season, by a big test, or by a girlfriend breaking up with me. I experienced suicidal depression, insomnia, brain hypertension, paranoia, and severe manic symptoms. During this time, my psychiatrist was several times over, and each doctor would radically change which meds I was on. One particular medicine gave me such a side effect of rage that I ended up randomly punching several holes in my mom's walls and cabinets.

In my sophomore year, there was even a social media hate group created entitled, "I Survived the Wrath of Brad Tarr." It was a page dedicated to humiliating me, attempting to ruin my reputation, to fan the flames of rumors about my supposed behavior and intentions, and to caricaturing my Christian faith. Fortunately, my principal had it taken down quickly. My diagnoses during that period was "Bipolar Disorder" and "Unspecified Mood Disorder."

Four years later, while I was at college, my symptoms flared up again. I had gone 3 days without sleep, was having angry outbursts over small matters, and was behaving in a paranoid manner. I was pacing around campus, talking to myself. I spent 14 days in a New England hospital, and was then sent home.

Within 4 weeks of being home, my symptoms began scaring my mother. She would lock her bedroom door at night for fear that my delusions or hallucinations would flare up and I would hurt her. I was illogical, I was unreasonable, and my grasp on reality was tenuous at best. She was unable to continue sharing an Apartment with me. I had to get out. It was Winter, and I was homeless. I was estranged from family because none of them knew how to cope with me, not even my siblings. I ended up in a homeless shelter.

I was there for about a month, in small quarters, that were crowded and cramped, with about 12 other people who were far sicker than even I was. After several days of being verbally threatened and bullied by others-- at one point a Schizophrenic man loudly threatened to slit my throat open-- I reared back and punched a hole in the wall of the shelter. This landed in trouble with the Law, and I was placed on 14 months of intensive Mental Health Court Probation. I was happy when I graduated from that program. It was the most trying ordeal of my life.

Two years later, I was super-symptomatic; it was the worst symptomatic season of my entire life. From February-May of 2019, I was hospitalized 5 times. I was depressed, then manic, then depressed again. I had severe bouts of insomnia, paranoia, delusions, and severe headaches. I had visual, auditory, and olfactory hallucinations. My delusions would vary. At one point I thought I was the Director of the NSA. Another time, I was the Secretary of Defense. I saw all things around me as a coded message from the Government. For 2 weeks I was a 007 Agent. I thought I was encountering MI-6 Agents almost everywhere I went. They were even dispersed and scattered throughout the crowds during Mass at Church.

In May of 2019, I was placed in the Richland County Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program. AOT is a collaboration between civil courts and the mental health system and is intended for those who are caught in the revolving door of hospitalization, homelessness, and incarceration. It was through this program that I finally received the help, support, and encouragement that I so desperately needed. I will forever be grateful Probate Judge Mayer and the mental health team at Catalyst Life Services for helping me to turn my life around.

I tell you all this, because I think it is important for you to understand that I know what it is like to have your life spiral out of control due to mental illness and not have the ability to stop it from crashing to the floor. I lost everything; my family, my home, and my personal liberty. Fortunately, through AOT, I have all those things back, but it was a long and difficult journey to get where I am today. It could have been a much shorter journey, had AOT reached me sooner.

HB576 makes it possible for others to get the life-saving Treatment they need. As was given to me. It will restore their competency, and their independence.

I urge you to pass this Bill.

It will save lives.

Respectfully,

Bradley N. Tarr