

HB576

Barb- Montgomery and PG Counties

Position: Support

I have a family member who has severe mental illness. As a result, he was homeless, living in a car and subsequently wandering aimlessly around the Bowie, sleeping in parks, etc. for months.

The man in question was a lawyer (who of course had lost his law job), yet couldn't understand that it wasn't normal for a lawyer to have no home, and sleep on park benches. It is painful to contemplate how penniless he was, as well as unmoored from reality.

A police called one day to say that he had given my number to the policeman. Our family was asked to come get him because he was wandering in the middle of traffic, barefoot and filthy. The policeman had said, "He's going to get himself killed out here."

This young man did not understand that he was ill or needed medication. He was detached from reality, let alone any concept of right and wrong. This posed a danger both to himself and others.

It's obvious someone in this condition doesn't have the mental capacity to make sound judgments that affect his or her own well-being. A friend of mine put it succinctly: "The laws protect an individual's right to remain crazy...."

The pain of this situation to the family is impossible to overstate. The mental well-being of all family members was affected.

Irrational behavior by someone who is sick may harm innocent members of the public. It is incumbent upon us to find humane ways to help—which can include laws that make it possible to insist that people take medication for severe, disabling psychotic illnesses.

I prefer to remain anonymous due to the personal nature of this testimony. But I do attest to the fact that the above letter is based on real--and devastating—personal experience.

Thank you for your attention to solving this very serious problem.

Barb