

HB1014 Testimony, Finance Committee

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Feb 24, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

Before I became homeless, I had been an honors student studying biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of Southern California on scholarship. I was competitive, scoring great grades, doing research and dreaming of obtaining an MD or PhD to cure cancer. But in 2002, just months before I was scheduled to finish my bachelor's degree, schizophrenia showed up like thief, interrupting and taking away my promising young life and future plans.

Rather than graduating from college and pursuing further education, **I found myself homeless in the Los Angeles area, eating food that was discarded in garbage cans and eventually sleeping outside every night in a churchyard near USC.**

During my senior year of college, my best efforts had produced failing grades in subjects that used to be easy for me. But I told myself I was not trying. I told myself I could work if I wanted to. The reality was that my shattered mind left me totally disabled, and I was not capable of working any job.

After three years of looking for garbage to eat on USC's campus, **I was briefly incarcerated for trespassing** on my beloved campus where I had once been the honor student.

On March 3, 2007, several months after my incarceration, I woke up in the churchyard screaming back at the voices in my mind, which were the most tortuous thing I have ever encountered in my life. When I least expected it, a police officer approached me and handcuffed me. He told me I was being taken to a psychiatric ward for observation.

**The resulting involuntary hospitalization, which I never would have consented to, radically changed my life.** I hated being hospitalized. I thought nothing was wrong with me, unaware that my experience hearing voices was psychosis. I wanted to return to my dirty, homeless life outside on the streets of LA. I thought that was my right.

But instead, I was mandated to begin antipsychotic medication. In treatment, I no longer wanted to be homeless. **With treatment, I was able to return to school, and finally finished my molecular biology degree with high honor.**

Today I live in my own apartment and work as President of the CURESZ Foundation (Comprehensive Understanding via Research and Education into Schizophrenia). All of

these wonderful developments in my life have been possible because I was hospitalized against my will.

Today I ask the question "Why"? **Why was I left to rot away on the streets of Los Angeles, eating garbage and getting soaked at night when it rained, over 13 months?** My parents would have done anything to help but I was too paranoid of them to accept their help.

Why didn't my parents and the police have the right to petition for an involuntary evaluation for hospitalization when I clearly had a mental illness and was unable to care for myself, and why didn't this happen before I broke the law?

Many people throughout the United States are in the same position I was. They are desperately ill, however, they are not an imminent danger to themselves or others. They are in desperate need of medication, but too sick to understand they need treatment.

**Involuntary hospitalization is often the only hope, as it was for me.**

Again, I ask, why was I not committed to a hospital sooner?

We must do better for our homeless people who are too ill to ask for help.

And we must do better for those living in their parents' home who badly need treatment, but are not yet an imminent danger to self or others. Many moms and dads must wait as their loved one becomes sicker and sicker until they qualify for involuntary intervention. This would never happen in other brain disorders such as Alzheimer's Disease or Parkinson's disease.