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Testimony in Support of H.B. 2281

I've been involved in three mental health crisis involving my son and the police who was criminalized "to help him" the first time when he was suicidal. I spent over an hour in the phone with our local DA who was perplexed about what to do then came to the conclusion pressing charges was the "only way to help" in this state. While in jail getting the supposed help, my son carried through the suicide attempt while in 'suicide watch' and had to be rushed to the hospital affirming the need for help was real. And each time since the first situation, my son has been deemed aggressive or dangerous. The second incident, another suicide attempt, turned into a standoff between my son and the police with me in the middle so he could have a chance to survive. The third incident resulted in more charges instead of much needed mental health services. I have had a probation office call me crying saying she has never seen anyone she served treated the way my son has been treated. I've had numerous professionals saying specifics of these incidents do not make sense to them. I recently filed a complaint because officers dismissed the need for a CIT team. The only time I feel anything went right was during the standoff when an officer began to acknowledge things for what they were, a mental health crisis and not a criminal situation. This officer used time and distance as a tactic. He found a connection and built on that to wait out the heightened state my son was in. He even remained on scene when everyone else left to ensure we were ok and validated.

Having more CIT teams would change the trajectory of many families lives by sending out trauma informed and trauma sensitive staff willing to use time and distance instead of bringing a punitive mindset into the crisis. This would reduce criminalization for mental health situations which only compound trauma(s).

H.B. 2881 will reduce the impact of traumatic events on the entire family system while allowing families to feel more supported and safer enough to ask for help. It would reduce the stress on officers who are not properly trained or have time and resources to deal with crisis situations. And, it will improve collaboration between systems that intersect through crisis situations and traumatic events.

Trauma Informed Care training is not expensive and can be offered to multiple systems at many levels. If we could just get people truly trained to approach each crisis situation as a traumatic event, we will cut down on causing more damage and enhance safety for individuals, communities and agencies.