

Proponent Testimony on HB 2353
Senate Committee on Judiciary
March 18, 2024

My name is Connie Hart and I am writing in support of HB2353. I have lived in Kansas for over 58 years. I am a small business owner in Wellington, Kansas. I have a son with mental illness. He was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, Type 1. He has been hospitalized over 30 times in the last 13 years.

I advocate for allowing treatment prior to full psychosis. In the past the law has prevented our son from getting help prior to reaching a full blown manic psychosis where he becomes at harm to himself or others. He has been in a hospital for 1 week, out for a week or two and then back in a hospital again. Gus has had manic episodes lasting for months. Due to medication taking longer to take effect, longer hospitalizations are needed. It does take months for a brain to heal after a manic episode. Because there isn't a continuum of care for our son's bipolar disorder, this results in a revolving door between hospitals, ER Rooms, Jails and time at home or independent living.

The new language if interpreted properly could allow for someone to receive care prior to becoming a harm to self or others. Allowing skilled professionals time to intervene and review a person's history, might allow for a quicker recovery and more appropriate treatment. When my son wasn't allowed medical assistance, his condition only worsened. More damage to his brain occurred and more time was needed for his recovery to return back to his baseline. His most recent episode resulted in 100 days of hospitalization and six months in a Level 2 Mental Health Nursing Home. By allowing a person like my son to get care sooner would have saved time for police, emergency services, health professionals, Kansas judicial system and all kinds of people.

I agree that adding the decompensation standards to the outpatient treatment order criteria will enable mental health facilities and judicial districts to intervene before a person with a documented history of mental illness decompensates to a point of being a danger to themselves or others. We hope this will dramatically change the lives of Kansas families by not forcing them into such dangerous situations struggling to transport family members in need of care who might be resistant to treatment.

I ask for your approval of the requested changes to HB2353 so my family will have hope when a future crisis arrives. Thank you to all the Kansans who have made strides to improve the mental health continuum and restore access and availability of mental health services.

Respectfully,

Connie Hart
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