

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

My name is Nick Hart. I am writing in support of HB 2353. I have four kids, my oldest son Gus (32) has Bipolar Disorder, type 1. He further carries the designation of having Severe and Persistent Mental Illness (SPMI) having been hospitalized over thirty times since his condition was diagnosed 13 years ago. He has been living with us for most of his adult life

We are a close, tight knit family with a family business. We spend a lot of time together and in the community. Gus is intelligent, charming hard working and good with people. He is adored by his nieces. But, with his condition, his mental health will cycle every six months to one year. When he is “amping up” on a cycle, he can go from hypomania (elevated mood) to psychosis in less than a week.

Allowing treatment prior to psychosis would help our family out tremendously. He has frequently been caught in the “threat to himself or others” criteria for getting in to treatment. My first-hand experience with a loved one going through a mental health crisis is analogous to a house fire. The sooner the intervention, the better the outcome will be. If a person is allowed to become psychotic or a threat to himself or others it will, before getting treatment it will take weeks or months for the person to stabilize. It is heart breaking as a parent knowing that your son needs treatment but does not meet screening criteria.

In January 2023, Gus was experiencing a severe psychotic episode. He was involved in a high speed automotive accident. He suffered extensive injuries, was in the Intensive Care Unit for 12 days, was in the hospital for over 100 days, and after that, was in Level 2 Mental Health Nursing Home for over 6 months. Thankfully, no one else was injured during the accident. However, the scenario could have played out with innocent people and LEOs being injured or even killed. This type of psychotic episode and outcome can be avoided with early intervention as detailed in HB 2353.

I agree that adding the standards outlined in HB 2353 will enable mental health facilities and judicial courts to intervene before a mental health issue becomes a crisis. Passage of the bill will positively change the lives of family’s that have a loved one with SPMI. Further, quicker interventions will help law enforcement officers (LEOs) and improve community safety prior to mental health escalations.

I would invite everyone to read the National Review Article “To help the mentally ill, help their families” by Stephen Eide. The article carries the by-line “How to correct the excesses of de-institutionalization.” The article is very good about explaining what it is like to have a loved one with SPMI.

I ask for your approval of the requested changes as outlined in HB2353. It will provide hope to me, my family and numerous families throughout Kansas who go through the same struggles. Passage will also help Kansas law enforcement officers and will make Kansas communities safer.

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