



EQUALITY ♦ LAW ♦ JUSTICE

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Proponent for SB 93
Senate Public Health & Welfare Committee
February 25, 2019

Chairman Sullentrop and members of the Committee:

My name is Stephanie West-Potter. I am the Director of Communications & Outreach at the Disability Rights Center of Kansas (DRC). DRC is a public interest legal advocacy organization that is part of a national network of federally mandated organizations empowered to advocate for Kansans with disabilities. DRC is the officially designated protection and advocacy system in Kansas. DRC is a private, 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, organizationally independent of state government and whose sole interest is the protection of the legal rights of Kansans with disabilities.

I am here today in support of SB 93 not only as a representative of the Disability Rights Center but also as a person with bipolar disorder urging you for protections.

Psychiatric medications are not like other medications. They are far from fast acting and what works for one person may cause harm to someone else.

Most medications require a titration process starting with a low dose and gradually increasing it to the therapeutic level in about a month. During that time, it is common to experience little to no relief of symptoms and yet experience intense side effects such as tremors, nausea, and uncontrollable movements.

Once the medication reaches the therapeutic level, the second round of the waiting game begins. Medications can take another 30-60 days to fully take effect. After three months of taking a medication, it is very possible that it did not work and a person will have to start all over again. In situations where the medication does work, it often isn't enough on its own. Because not all medications work for everyone, it's necessary to introduce one medication at a time, thus prolonging the journey to recovery.

I currently take 5 different medications to treat my bipolar disorder. It took me 10 years, 6 psychiatrists, and over 20 medications to find my perfect cocktail.

Without the right medication, I was in a constant cycle of pain and self-destruction.

I would experience the highs of mania that would allow me to go days without sleep and make me feel so invincible that I would put myself into very dangerous situations--Then I would crash into a depression that would cause me to isolate in my apartment, sleeping more hours than awake, crying until my eyes swelled shut, and feeling like my only option was to end my life.

After trying countless combinations of medications, I finally found what works for me.

These medications, along with therapy and an amazing support system, have allowed me to live a successful life with a career and family that I didn't think would be possible. I have not only maintained employment but have established myself as a professional in a career I am passionate about. And today I stand before you and publicly share my story, hoping my experiences shed light on the importance of protecting people from being forced to try medications that have already proven to be a failure or making changes to a medication regimen that successfully provides stability.

I'm terrified to think of what my life would be like if I were forced to change my medication and start all over again.

I would be at risk of losing my career, tearing my family apart, and destroying everything I have worked so hard for. Also, as painful as it is to say, I would be at risk of dying by suicide as do almost 20% of people with untreated or mistreated bipolar disorder.

My story is just one example of why SB 93 is crucial for stability and survival. People shouldn't have to suffer through months of a cheaper medication in order to earn the ability to take what can save their life.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for this bill. I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Stephanie West-Potter
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