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Morrill, KS

Testimony in Support of H.B. 2281

I had a niece, a graduate of Washburn Law School in Topeka, who suffered from a psychotic break. She was taken into custody by the police, after acting erratically at a quick shop and then she was admitted to an ER, where the doctor determined she was having a psychotic break. She was dismissed several hours later after the doctor decided she was not a threat to herself or others.

Obviously, she was not in her right mind; her parents and I tried to intervene and get her help at Valeo. A person on the crisis line at Valeo told us to bring her into their facility, but we couldn't convince her to go with us. She was talking to nonexistent people, she was lashing out and her volatile, unpredictable behavior was scary. At one point, she made a run for her car to leave her apartment complex and we knew at all costs, we had to stop her, as she would be dangerous on the road. As we tried to stop her, my sister-in-law and I became entangled with my niece in the driver's seat and while we were telling her to stop and not leave, she started her car and drove off dragging us on the driveway. It was the most terrifying experience of my life. She sped down the street and entered traffic on 21st St. in Topeka; we called the police to report the situation and express our concerns about her erratic behavior and danger behind the wheel. Two officers responded to the call and said there was nothing they could do! They were aware that the police had been called numerous times to the complex due to my niece's behavior; they were aware that she had been taken into custody early that morning, but they said there was nothing they could do, as she was not a threat to herself or others. I showed them the holes in my jacket, where I was drug; I showed them the lacerations and the beginnings of bruises, and asked if they thought she was a danger to others. They said they would not consider that so and there was nothing they could do.

The bottom line: we needed help to get HER help! We needed someone with the proper training to talk to her; to reason with her; to work with her to get her the help she desperately needed. In the end, she disappeared somewhere in Kansas City and was gone for over one and a half years. Her car was abandoned in Omaha. She lived as a homeless person, on the streets in Washington DC and Philadelphia, before someone put her on a bus back to Kansas City. We don't know all the particulars of her experiences on the East Coast, but one can imagine it was frightening, especially for a young woman.

I strongly feel if we had gotten the help we needed that day in Topeka, her life could have been spared the injustice and pain of the system ignoring mental illness. She needed help; everyone knew she needed help and we couldn't find it.

Dialing 988 will mean that trained professionals, with experience in mental health, will be available to offer assistance to individuals and families. They will be able to tell families what to do and what to say; mental health professionals will respond to the scenes and deescalate the

situations and get individuals the help they deserve. We didn't know what we were dealing with that day; we didn't know what to say or do. A response team would be better equipped and trained to handle the situation.

Families and individuals need to know they have somewhere to turn in a mental health crisis.