

Lisa Bethancourth
Fort Fairfield
LD 769

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100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Testimony in Support of LD 769 “An Act Regarding Access to
Behavior Health Supports for Adults with Certain Disabilities”

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the
Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Lisa Betancourth and over the years I have worn many hats. I have worked for Head Start, Job Corps, as a DSP and a CNA. I was also previously a chapter advisor for Speaking Up For Us (SUFU), which was one of the best jobs I have ever had.

But my most rewarding job has been as a mother. I have six children, but my second child is forever 21. His name is Andrew and he lived a difficult life. I am here today as a mother to

share what Andrew and I experienced.

His young life was hard. He was diagnosed at the age of 4 with Bipolar, but as I look back I

believe he was misdiagnosed and was likely on the Autism spectrum. This is not an official

diagnosis as I am not trained in that, but now that I have learned more I strongly feel this

diagnosis is a better fit. I also believe if we had received the correct diagnosis and early

intervention, we would have had a very different outcome.

At the age of 5 Andrew was placed in Acadia due to “behaviors.” He was very impulsive and

would do things that were not safe, like running down the middle of the road. His therapist at the time thought that Acadia would be the best fit to try to find medications. This was the beginning of a long journey of physical and chemical restraints.

I would get up and drive to Acadia every day and had just had a baby and would drive there 5 days a week. This became my full-time job. He would always be so happy to see me arrive each day. However, the hardest part was that when I left my son each time, they would have to papoose him. I am not sure if you know what this means, but my little boy was tied down with a straight jacket like device to a board and he would scream, “Don’t leave me.” I couldn’t do anything and I trusted the people who were taking care of him. Not only was he physically

restrained, he was chemically restrained with medications. I left Andrew in Acadia for three

months that first time. This is where his trauma first started.

Andrew ended up in and out of different facilities throughout his life where he was restrained. It didn’t matter where he went, Acadia, Fort Kent. He was medicated his entire life and when he turned 18 he decided he didn’t want to be medicated by doctors anymore. That is when he started self-medicating with marijuana and then it grew to using opiates. This was extremely hard to watch as a mother.

In October 2016, Andrew was being arrested due to his substance abuse. His friend called me and I could hear him screaming at the top of his lungs in a savage voice... “Let me go, Let me go!” When I arrived at the hospital, he was hand cuffed to a bed. I thought this was going to finally be a chance for Andrew to get help from the system. I was hoping he would be arrested because then he might be safe. I was hoping for him to go to rehab, but they just let him go and told me I needed to figure it out.

Andrew moved in with us that October and stayed clean and sober for five months. I helped him get an apartment and get a case manager.

In April the following year, his friend asked him to use one more time and this took his life. Andrew passed away from an accidental overdose. I am not ashamed to say this, because this is what has happened to many good kids that have been lost because of a broken system.

If he were still here today, I still believe he would be restrained. The stigma of his name and his history followed him throughout his life. The system failed my child his whole entire life. I think about the people who failed him as a child and an adult. It was not from lack of trying on my part to get him help. I am still his biggest advocate. I will tell his story and I will say his name on a daily basis. No family, or kid should ever have to go through this again. The genuine look of fear on his face when he was being restrained; I just can't even explain it. I knew when his voice went into that high pitch screaming, he was lost and went right back to where he was when he was first restrained at Acadia at 5 years old. He had a trauma reaction to being restrained and would go into a fight or flight mode. It was primal and survival of the fittest.

I just never want to have anyone have to go through this again, whether it starts as a child or as an adult. It is just not ok!! I wish I could go back and change things for Andrew and it could be different. That is why I feel I needed to say something today, so that people can hear what a lifelong result of restraint can do to a person. It was people I trusted who restrained him. It was a system I trusted that ended up hurting Andrew. I feel that I failed my son because I was unable to save him from a life of a vicious ongoing cycle.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony today and I urge you to pass LD 769.

Sincerely,

Lisa Bethancourth
Fort Fairfield, ME
lbeta25@yahoo.com