

My name is Linda. I'm the mother of a son diagnosed with schizophrenia. County, ADMHS, now renamed the Behavior Wellness Department had told me to step back in order to allow the staff to do their job. So I did.

Upon his release from numerous hospital stays, the hospital would fax letters informing ADMHS staff that their evaluation of Michael concluded that he would benefit from more intensive care, as his illness was debilitating & incapacitating. His care was never followed up on. His mental state and illness spiraled severely downhill that he became homeless for a little over 3 years. His mental state got to the point that he believed he was well & would say he didn't need any help.

Friends & family members would see him at the bus station on weekends asking why the buses were running late because he had to see his case manager. Michael was told if he asked for help he would get it. I witnessed Michael asking for help but ADMHS never provided it.

Michael & I filled out and filed several grievance forms, yet nothing came of them. I tried numerous times to set up an appointment and made numerous phone calls to BW Director, Alice Gregghorn, but she refused to see or talk to me. Once, when I was standing at the door outside of her office, her staff closed the door & told me she was busy. I went to the front desk & was told Alice is available. When the desk clerk called Alice & she asked my name, I was told no appointments were available.

Laura's Law is desperately needed. I know in my experience, help, treatment & visits do work, if the staff takes the time and trouble to patiently reach out to a client who is isolated in a world of their own.

One time the department sent Michael to the Residential Crisis Center in Santa Maria. Shortly thereafter, I received a phone call telling me that my son was surrounded by Santa Maria police officers and that County mental health staff had to stand by because he was one of their patients. While this ordeal taking place I was receiving phone calls from my family & the department's Patients Rights Advocate, Kay Kayser Waldo. My daughter was sending me updates from the news coverage. I called the police station in Santa Maria & pleaded with them not to hurt my son! I told them that he heard voices & he was off his medications. They assured me they would not hurt him.

I found out he was shot. I called back & the hospital or the police station could not give me any information until the investigation was done!

Later that day, after calling numerous times, I was just told the man shot did not have the birthmark I mentioned! I fell to the floor in the background at the store where I work & cried. No one should have to live through the experiences I have experience because of an ill family member!

As a parent of a mentally ill son, and based on my horrific experience in trying to get the help he needed to no avail for years, I know that Laura's law will help! It's time Behavior Wellness did their job. I am aware that the department received funding to launch an AOT pilot program. This is money well spent and it is long overdue! Please do not cut the funds to this program!

Michael was repeatedly sent to a sober living house in Boyle Heights by the name of the Millennium

House, near Skid Row. I specifically pleaded with ADMHS numerous times not to send him there since I was very familiar with their so-called treatment program which consisted of a bed to sleep in, until a man chose to leave, in which case their bed was given to someone else. I knew Michael was not capable of complying with any program without daily monitoring & medical treatment. No matter how I pleaded for him not to be sent there they would send him. Each time I had to go to Los Angeles and drive the streets for days and nights on my own to look for him.

Sometimes I slept in my car when it got too late. I would park my car near the White Memorial hospital & hoped I'd be safe. Time after time when MICHAEL was sent there I'd find him! I would drive after work at times but I never gave up.

While looking for Michael morning and night in Boyle Heights and skid row, I'd get out of my car & would go walking in all of their parks, stopping at every bus bench calling out his name at all hours. I asked homeless people with Michael's picture. At times I was told he had been seen. And every time I searched for Michael I'd find him. Sometimes in a few days but I would find him & bring Michael back. And yet repeatedly he would be sent back.

In October 2016 it took me a little longer to find him. I drove up with a friend and to our surprise he had walked to Whittier from Boyle Heights due to his psychosis. He had walked non-stop. I hardly recognized him. He lost tremendous amount of weight, and all of his belongings. He looked skeletal & he was needing to hold up his pants he'd lost so much weight.

Finally, after extensive pleading with letters and interventions on behalf of Michael by myself and other parents of mentally ill children, Michael was given conservatorship and is now in a hospital.

I believe that NO parent should have to go through what I went through. My life and Michael's was a living nightmare trying to get the help he needed. I believe Laura's law is needed. Believe me, it will save lives.

In December I was told I had cancer, and that the type I had was due to stress. I'm re-living my nightmare in writing this letter to you in order that other families in my situation will never have to go through what we did.

Thank you.

Linda O. Orozco