

Thank you, chairperson and committee members.

My name is Cynthia Harrison. I live in Ann Arbor and I have a son named Anthony who lives with a serious mental health condition.

When Anthony was a child he was diagnosed with a host of illnesses, including anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, ADHD and other learning issues. Since he was young, we have worked with psychiatrists, counselors, case managers, and therapists to get him the care he needs so he can have the same quality of life as his peers.

But when Anthony was a teenager an emotional outburst at night near our home prompted a neighbor to call 911 to alert them of a disturbance when he kicked over a garbage can. A police officer was sent, and despite the fact that Anthony was experiencing a behavioral health crisis, he was arrested and charged with misdemeanor disturbing the peace and disorderly conduct.

And just like that, my beautiful son was labeled a criminal. This minor incident was his on ramp into the criminal legal system and it changed the entire trajectory of his life.

Over time, his interactions with the criminal justice system increased - in part because once you have a record, authorities begin to treat you like a criminal; in part because when you are treated like a criminal you begin to believe that's who you are. And in part because it's the police who show up when there is no one else to call during a behavioral health emergency. When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

That incident was 12 years ago. Most recently, my son spent nearly a year in jail awaiting sentencing on felony drug charges. Finally, this past Monday, he was released into residential treatment. If behavioral health responders had been available to Anthony when he was in crisis, his life would have been very different.

He wouldn't be a felon if the system had addressed his mental health issues early and appropriately. With the right support he could be a productive tax-paying citizen. Instead taxpayers are paying for him to be in jail.

Please support this legislation so we can stop criminalizing mental illness and start helping people like my son Anthony get the resources they need to remain safe and healthy members of our community.

Thank you for your time.

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