

Testimony before the Senate Health Committee
June 14, 2006

Good afternoon Senator Ortiz and members of the Committee.

For the record, my name is Nick Wilcox and with me today is my wife Amanda. I would like to begin by thanking Senators Aanestad and Kuehl for signing on to AB 2357 as coauthors.

I think that most of you are familiar with our story. Five and a half years ago, our daughter, Laura, was at work at the Nevada County Behavioral Health clinic, a client appeared for a scheduled appointment. Without warning or provocation, he drew a handgun and shot Laura four times. When the rampage at the clinic and at a nearby restaurant ended, Laura and two others lay dead, and three were injured.

We first testified before this committee almost exactly four years ago on behalf of Helen Thomson's AB 1421. We had a general sense at that time that there was something terribly wrong with our mental health care delivery system. Scott Thorpe, who was a long-term client of the clinic, was suffering from severe paranoid schizophrenia. He had no insight into his condition and he refused to take the medications his psychiatrist recommended. There was no program in place to keep track of him and respond to his deteriorating condition.

We have since learned that Scott Thorpe's family was very concerned about his condition and were making frantic calls to the clinic seeking intervention. For privacy reasons, most calls were not returned. In the one call that did get through, Thorpe's sister-in-law was told that if she did not like the situation then she should change the law. This we have tried to do.

We have also learned that in any given year more than half of those with serious mental illness receive no treatment and that of those, 55% lacked insight into their condition and denied that they had any problem. We believe that the treatment program envisioned under Laura's Law would have benefited Scott Thorpe and that a court order might have made him compliant with a treatment program.

Scott Thorpe is currently a client at the Napa State Hospital. Now that he is in an environment where he can be required to take his medication, his medication has proven to be very effective at controlling his symptoms. We have been told that his behavior now appears normal...he wakes up every morning understanding the horrific crime that he committed. We find it tragic that it took the deaths of Laura and two others for Scott Thorpe to finally receive proper mental health care.

As you know, Laura's Law has not been widely implemented in California. We ask that you allow Laura's Law to live up to its potential, as have similar laws in other states. Laura's Law is modeled after Kendra's Law in New York State. The New York

experience has shown Kendra's Law to be very effective at reducing hospitalization, incarceration and homelessness. One would expect the same results here if Laura's law were given a chance to prove its value. In a state as large and diverse as California, we need the ability to use every available tool to help those with severe mental illness lead productive lives.

We humbly ask for your aye vote on AB 2357 to extend the sunset date for Laura's Law.

Thank you.