

NAMI Nevada County

The County's Voice on Mental Illness
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June 14, 2006

The Honorable Deborah Ortiz, Chair
Senate Health Committee
State Capitol Building, Room 5114
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: NAMI Nevada County Supports AB 2357

Dear Senator Ortiz:

NAMI Nevada County supports AB 2357 and I am requesting your support as well. AB 2357 (Assemblymembers Betty Karnette and Leland Yee) will amend Laura's Law on assisted outpatient mental health treatment to keep this law in place and give counties the time needed to make it work. This bill will be heard in the Senate Health Committee on June 14, 2006.

On a personal note, my 43-year old son has been afflicted with serious mental illness since age 17. Though he responds well to medical treatment, his compliance with treatment has been limited because of his denial of this highly stigmatized brain disease. We now know that denial is a part of the disease process. Lack of treatment has led to numerous psychiatric hospitalizations, at times living on the streets leading to incarcerations and homelessness and a quality of life for my son which falls far short of his potential and the expectations of his parents.

When Laura's Law (AB 1421, Assemblywoman Helen Thomson) was passed in 2002, I had high hopes that my son would receive appropriate treatment in his own community through assisted outpatient treatment (AOT). Yet today, here in Nevada County as in almost all counties in California, we have not yet implemented Laura's Law. Nevada County now has plans to do just that under funding from the Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63). Yet, there is a clock ticking on this Laura's Law "Demonstration Project", which has a sunset clause. AB 2357 would extend the sunset clause until 2013 and give our county, and all counties, more time to implement Laura's Law.

You may not be aware that AB 1421 was named after Laura Wilcox, a Nevada County resident, who was among three shot to death on January 10, 2001 by Scott Thorpe, who refused needed mental health treatment.

Nevada County legislators Senator Sam Aanestad and Assemblyman Rick Keene have both taken strong positions in support of Laura's Law and AB 2357. Senator Aanestad is a co-author on both AB 1421 and AB 2357.

Please vote to give our counties time to implement Laura's Law by supporting AB 2357.

Very truly yours,

Rod Pence, Legislative Representative