

Testimony for CVH Whiting Task Force

October 20, 2020

Jim Flannery

My name is Jim Flannery, I was born and raised in Wethersfield, CT and currently live in Glastonbury, CT. My reason for speaking today is that I have experience with the mental health system in the state of Connecticut that I believe is valuable to your decision-making process on the CVH Whiting Task Force.

As you'll undoubtedly hear from other testimonies, many people who get labelled with psychiatric diagnosis feel that their emotional distress is a direct result of trauma they've experienced.

I am here to share with this Task Force today that the greatest trauma I've ever experienced in my life was in September of 2008 when I was involuntarily introduced to Connecticut's mental health system.

I believe this is significant, so I will repeat it: the greatest trauma I've ever experienced was at the hands of Connecticut's mental health system.

To be clear, I reject the hypothesis that the cause of my distress is a genetic or neurochemical imbalance, and instead, I am claiming my trauma was specifically caused by the state of Connecticut's mental health system.

The late physicist Carl Sagan used to say that "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence". However, I invite you instead to listen to the words of philosopher and psychologist, William James, who said: "If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black, you mustn't seek to show that no crows are; it is enough if you prove one single crow to be white."

I am therefore forced to beg that you please accept me at my word that the mental health system in Connecticut can serve its opposite purpose, of harming rather than healing, by offering to show you a single white crow: me.

I understand that my testimony will immediately be questionable because of the diagnosis I was given. That being said, it is **Connecticut's** system that gave me that diagnosis. It's not **my** diagnosis, it's **yours**, so it is **your** problem to deal with it, not **mine**.

By the way, the consequences I've endured because you gave me that diagnosis are profound. Aside from the physical torture I've endured at the hands of Connecticut's mental system (where I was locked up, isolated, tied down, and repeatedly injected with unwanted chemical restraints), more importantly, the mental health system in Connecticut stripped me of my credibility and dignity as a human being.

Before entering Connecticut's system, I was considered a credible voice: a *magna cum laude* graduate from a prestigious university with a degree in biomedical engineering. Once I entered Connecticut's mental health system, I became nothing. I am now less than human in your eyes, and consequently, in the eyes of the public.

If you think I'm speaking in hyperbole, let's test the theory.

I am standing here claiming that Connecticut's mental health system actually works as a social control system that uses torture, terror, and chemical restraints to oppress someone into obedience. And I'm telling you that that someone is me.

Already, I know that you look at me as an illegitimate witness to *my own experience* and that you don't believe me.

That's ok. I don't hold it against you. I understand your position, after all, I grew up in Connecticut and understand the mechanisms by which people in power use shame and judgment to dismiss the oppressed. My worldview does not require you to believe me, but it does require me to speak out against injustice.

I do not blame you, as an individual. You had nothing to do with the creation of Connecticut's mental health system. In a way, you are also a victim of this system, just as I am.

How so?

You're a victim too because I am standing here, a total stranger to you, telling you that by working within Connecticut's mental health system, that you are perpetuating crimes against humanity, and that is probably unfair of me to judge you in that way because I don't really know anything about you.

All I know is that you are here to perpetuate a mental health system which has caused irreparable harm to me and many others. But it's not really fair of me to judge you without knowing you, just as it was unfair of Connecticut's mental health system to judge me without really knowing me.

I understand it's a survival mechanism to draw rapid-fire conclusions based on limited information. So I am offering to extend some compassion to you and your perspective in exchange for requesting you also extend the same compassion to me.

In a testimony like this, I am supposed to conclude with a suggestion for you how you can improve things. I don't want to add more to your already full plate, so instead of asking you to do something, I'd like to ask you to stop doing something. In fact, I'm not asking... I'm demanding and begging and pleading...

Please stop using force. That is my uncompromising request: stop using force. When I say "force" I am referring to literal force, like the way you tied me down to a bed and injected with me with drugs repeatedly and then locked me in a ward and continued to forcibly drug me until I submitted to your whims. I politely ask you to stop using force in this way.

However, there is another kind of force that I also beg you to stop. This second kind of force is called "coercion." What do I mean by coercion? When I say "coercion", I am referring to the indirect ways in which you use force. Examples of this include telling people they cannot leave a psychiatric hospital unless they take your psychiatric drugs or that you will take away their subsidized housing if they don't take psychiatric drugs. This is an indirect form of force and it is incredibly harmful.

Now please allow me to conclude with something concrete about the effect Connecticut's mental health system has on me, because honestly, that is the only way you will take this seriously.

I am willing to admit, that when I am in Connecticut, that I live in perpetual fear. My fear is of YOU. I am afraid of YOU. And when I say "you", I am speaking to you specifically as an individual in power in the state of Connecticut with influence in our mental health system.

I am afraid of you because I know that without breaking any laws, I can be subjected to imprisonment and psychiatric torture at your hands. Not only does this harm me, but it harms the people in my family, it harms my friends, it harms my community, and it harms society at large.

I have fought hard to regain my inner compass so that I can exist in this state, but I am not free and will not be free until Connecticut's mental health system stops using force. I am a 34 year old, white man living in the wealthiest state in America, yet I feel imprisoned.

I feel imprisoned because I cannot express myself and speak out against the injustices the state of Connecticut has perpetuated against innocent people like myself, because I am afraid that by speaking out, you will punish me with perpetual psychiatric incarceration and chemical torture.

Despite these fears, I am still here to speak. Because it is only by being here... and speaking out publicly that I can protect myself. It is only by standing here publicly and calmly saying, "Stop torturing people... like you did to me", that I can find protection. It is only by shining a light on these atrocities so the world can see what you do to people that I am able to find safety.

It is my *desperate* strategy, that by speaking here today, I can have hope is that if the state of Connecticut locks me up again, that someone out there will know that I am in there and that I am innocent and that I am suffering at *your* hands. And maybe, just maybe, if someone on the outside knows what is happening, there will be someone to fight for me to have my mind freedom.

I know you're going to ignore my wishes and you're going to do whatever your bosses and your budgets dictate, so I just beg of you, that when faced with decisions regarding Connecticut's mental health system, whatever those decisions may be, that you choose LOVE over FEAR.