

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you this morning. My name is Dorothy Tengler.

This is my only son, Todd – a blue-eyed, blonde-haired, gentle little boy not unlike all the other little boys on the block. He was smart. He was funny. He was loving. That was 35 years ago. Today, Todd roams the streets of his town, believing he is a member of the United Nations. He has tried to force his way into the back rooms of a local supermarket to investigate a murder he believes to have happened. He has stood outside the elementary school, copying down the numbers of the school buses, telling police officers and wary onlookers that all the children inside the school belonged to him. As a member of the UN, Todd believes he does not need to pay his electric bill, so his electricity is turned off on a regular basis. I can't reach him on his cell phone anymore because he has taken out the chip, looking for evidence of surveillance. Todd believes that most of us are somehow connected to Hitler. Even me. He doesn't believe I am his mother. He believes that I ran an illegal sperm bank when he was a little boy, and somehow he is a result of that. Before all this happened, Todd earned a degree in computer graphics, was a talented musician, and loved spending time with the rest of his family.

But when Todd was in his early thirties, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Todd's delusions have been chilling, including being hunted by the FBI in helicopters for, among other evil acts, the murder of his grandfather. He has been hospitalized more times than I care to count. He has been mandated to periods of outpatient therapy, and when forced to take a low dose of antipsychotics, Todd has been highly functioning and able to live a fairly normal life.

But Todd doesn't believe he is sick. So, he refuses to take medication.

In fact, it has been at least 3 years since Todd last took medication. And his paranoia is escalating. Recently, he was arrested for simple harassment. He didn't appear for the hearing because, of course, as a member of the UN, he has the power to veto court orders. So, a bench warrant was issued. Todd still doesn't quite understand what he did to be arrested. He spent 3 weeks in prison before he had someone call me to post bail. He faces a trial at the end of October.

Todd is a ticking bomb. And I wait each day for his life to explode.

Now, I believe that each of us has the right to exert control over our lives – be able to decide if we want treatment for our diseases, be able to say yes or no. However, there comes a point when the very nature of many mental illnesses precludes the ability to reason and destroys any trace of insight. To that end, I believe that as moral human beings, those of us standing on the sidelines of these devastating illnesses need to extend a hand and help these individuals become stable and reclaim their lives. What I *don't* believe is that those with mental illness be left alone in their darkness until they reach a certain level of dangerousness before receiving treatment – like waiting for a certain number of fatalities to occur at a dangerous intersection before erecting a traffic light.

As a family member, a mother, I support PA'S SB 226. With assisted outpatient treatment, we can bring many of these loved ones back to their families, their friends, and importantly, their communities. Pass SB 226 for the millions of untreated persons with mental illness. Pass it for my son, Todd.