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TESTIMONY REGARDING ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 430

By
James J. Vilt, Esq.
of the
Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center
March 31, 2003

This testimony is submitted on behalf of Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center (NDALC), Nevada's federally mandated, governor designated protection and advocacy system for individuals with disabilities. See the Protection and Advocacy for Mentally Ill Individuals Act of 1986 (42 U.S.C. §10801 et seq); the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1975 (42 U.S.C. §6041 et seq); and the Protection and Advocacy for Individual Rights Program of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. §794e).

AB 430 is an important recognition of the unique needs of Nevada's seriously mentally ill populace. It is especially important in light of the mental health "crisis," as it can fairly be termed, that we are experiencing in Southern Nevada.

The ability of persons with serious mental illness to thrive in the community is largely dependent on their willingness to *voluntarily* manage the symptoms of their mental illness. Given the scarcity of community supports for Nevadans with serous mental illness, medication is often the predominate, if not the only, tool these individuals are given.

For those Nevadans who are poor and seriously mentally ill, few will have the opportunity to see a psychiatrist with much regularity. Therefore, they will often be prescribed medications for extended periods.

If access to the medications these individuals prefer is restricted, often the newer generation drugs, some will choose simply to stop taking their medication as they may find the side effects less bearable than the symptoms of the illness it was meant to treat. The resulting effects of such an individual's untreated or improperly treated mental illness will likely not only be felt by the individual. Families, hospitals and, oftentimes, the criminal justice system may also be impacted.

Certainly cost containment may be an important state objective, however, NDALC submits that this objective may not be realized by placing restrictions on prescriptions drugs for the mentally ill.

ASSEMBLY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
DATE: 03/31 ROOM: 3138 EXHIBIT E
SUBMITTED BY: James Vilt