



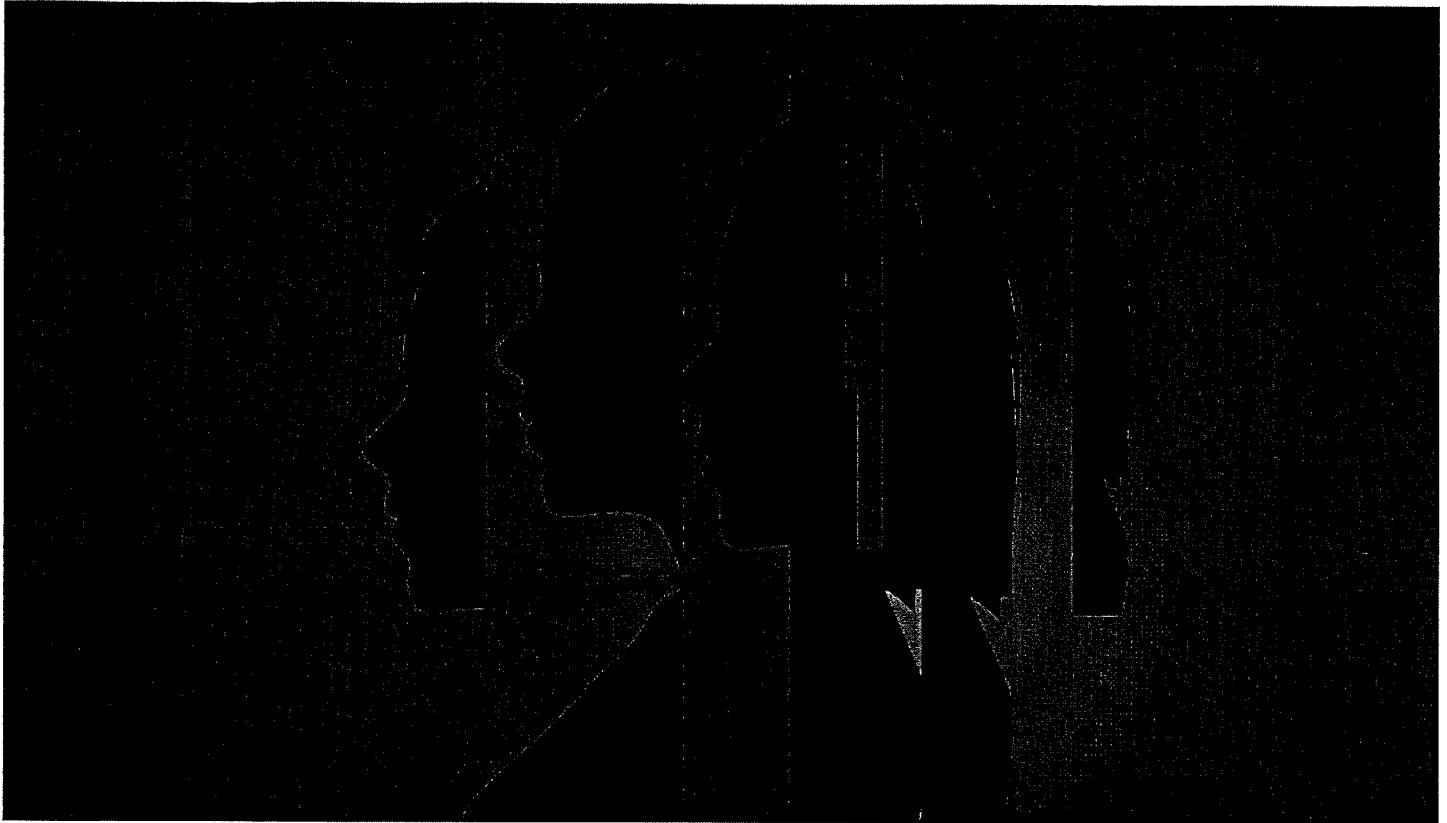
COMMENTARIES

Minnesota's mental health system is failing the ill

A bipartisan update to existing law, explained by the legislators proposing it.

By multiple authors

MARCH 9, 2025 AT 5:29PM



"The Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC), a national organization that works to eliminate barriers to care for people with serious mental illness, rates Minnesota's civil commitment statute as the best in the nation. Our structure is exemplary; our follow-up, unfortunately, is not," the writers say. (iStock)



Opinion editor's note: *Strib Voices publishes a mix of guest commentaries online and in print each day. To contribute, [click here](#).*

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This article was signed by several members of the Minnesota Legislature. Their names are listed below.

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Sleeping outside during Minnesota winters can be deadly. It can also be cruel. Despite exhaustive efforts by his loving family, Jeremy was sleeping in a cold alley when a garbage truck ran over his legs, inflicting compound fractures. Jeremy has schizophrenia. He has no insight into the fact that he has a terrible brain disease. He was civilly committed. Say what?

The whole purpose of going through the trauma of obtaining court-ordered treatment is to provide care even when the person's brain doesn't allow them to know they need it. We need more accountability to ensure that the few people who meet this high bar don't fall

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between the cracks.

We Republican and Democratic legislators are offering legislation to address this. We believe this is the year for taking bipartisan stock of how our mental health system is failing people who need it the most. People like Jeremy who are dangerous enough to themselves or others to qualify for civil commitment surely fit that category and need our help.

The Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC), a national organization that works to eliminate barriers to care for people with serious mental illness, rates Minnesota's civil commitment statute as the best in the nation. Our structure is exemplary; our follow-up, unfortunately, is not. TAC's data shows that people who receive follow-up after court orders have very different outcomes from those who don't. States with good follow-up save money, another goal that interests us and many Minnesotans across the state.

Last session the Legislature funded a few engagement pilots designed to help people in mental health crisis before they reach the high bar for civil commitment or commit a crime, sadly a common door for entering the mental health system. We know that providing earlier help can save brains from deteriorating, while also saving lives and money.

The legislation we introduced last week, [SF 1492](#), will build on our excellent civil commitment statute and the engagement pilots. The bill creates an oversight coordinating division within the Attorney General's Office that is charged to ensure the system is accountable for our residents with the most serious mental illnesses. The division will collect data so we know on a statewide basis where civilly committed people end up and how they fare. Where are the weak points where people fall out of the system? Should there be better communication with courts between six-month civil commitment appearances? Are the engagement pilots helping?

The division coordinator, working with a broad-based advisory committee, will advocate for better cross-jurisdictional ways to help our most vulnerable populations, people like Jeremy. We believe our bill is a commonsense way to do so, and to save lives and money, without trampling on civil liberties, simply bolstering and ensuring the effectiveness of the excellent civil commitment statute we already have in place.

This article was signed by state Sens. Ron Latz, DFL-St. Louis Park; Rich Draheim, R-Madison Lake; Jim Abeler, R-Anoka; Paul Utke, R-Park Rapids; Carla Nelson, R-Rochester; Nick Frentz, DFL-North Mankato; John Hoffman, DFL-Champlin; Tou Xiong, DFL-Maplewood, and state Rep. Peter Fischer, DFL-Maplewood.