



Feb. 23, 2018

STATEMENT ON RECENT PROPOSALS TO INSTITUTIONALIZE PEOPLE WITH
MENTAL HEALTH DISABILITIES

The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law condemns President Trump's recent claim that the forced institutionalization of people with mental health disabilities will promote community safety. This statement must be recognized for what it is: an uninformed and discriminatory policy proposal that ignores the uncontroverted evidence that addressing mental illness has virtually no impact on gun violence. It also flies in the face of decades of progress made by state mental health service systems, away from warehousing hundreds of thousands of individuals on the back wards of state psychiatric hospitals to more effective community-based mental health services. President Trump has called for a return to a time when the civil rights of millions of Americans could be stripped away with little to no due process, and when a person could be involuntarily institutionalized for years and subjected to, at best, inadequate mental health treatment and, in many cases, abuse, neglect, and unnecessary medical procedures, including sterilization. We have moved away from this horrific past, but proposals like President Trump's threaten the lives and liberties of people with mental health disabilities and must be rejected, again and again, in the strongest of terms.

The Bazelon Center was founded in 1972 to advocate for people with mental health disabilities and fight against these abuses. Our work has successfully helped to ensure that people with mental health disabilities have the right, and the services they need, to live, work, and raise families in their own communities. Rhetoric like President Trump's not only encourages discrimination against and stigmatizes people with mental health disabilities, it also drags us back into the past. People with mental health disabilities are not the cause of gun violence in America, and they must not be the scapegoats in this discussion. Labeling people with mental health disabilities as "dangerous" and calling for forced institutionalization on the basis of mental illness alone is irresponsible, unconstitutional, and unacceptable, and it must stop.