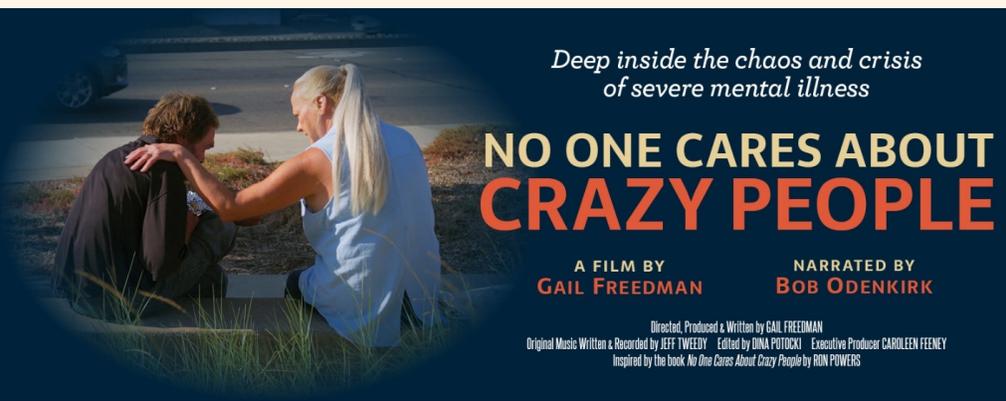




# SMI ADVOCATE

An advocacy update from Treatment Advocacy Center

## Film Brings Advocates Together in Iowa City



Katie Helbing, Shadoe Jones, Leslie Carpenter, Lisa Dailey, Gail Freedman, Nina Richtman, Jerri Clark and Ashlee Reyes prior to the screening.



Leslie Carpenter, Gail Freedman, and Lisa Dailey during the post-screening panel discussion with the audience.



The TAC Advocacy Department and TAC’s executive director, Lisa Dailey, attended the screening of “No One Cares About Crazy People” on November 19, 2025 in Iowa City, Iowa. Leslie Carpenter coordinated this screening with the film’s director and executive producer, Gail Freedman, in collaboration with NAMI Johnson County and the University of Iowa’s School of Nursing, School of Social Work, and School of Journalism and Mass Communication at a local independent film theater, FilmScene. In addition to the screening, Leslie and Gail also presented talks for University of Iowa students in each of these departments, which Gail references in this interview with Beth Malicki from KCRG:

[‘No One Cares About Crazy People’ depicts difficult reality to sold out Iowa City theater.](#)

The screening of the film was sold out, and the audience engaged with the panel consisting of Gail Freedman, Lisa Dailey, and Leslie Carpenter, following the film’s showing. Many additional conversations happened in the lobby afterward, leading to more opportunities for advocacy and collaborations locally to improve the treatment of people living with severe mental illness.

# Advocates in Washington Work to Open New Treatment Center

A \$79 million inpatient mental health treatment facility sits finished but vacant in southwest Washington state because the legislature withdrew operations funding during its 2025 session, before the state-of-the-art psychiatric facility opened.

Family advocates are working to open three buildings, totaling 48 secure beds, to serve people with severe mental illness (SMI) who need this level of care. Use of the beds is part of the discussion, with advocates seeking to ensure that criminal-legal involvement isn't a requirement for admission.

Family advocates contacted elected officials, wrote articles for local media, organized regular meetings, and requested a tour of the facility to shine light on the issue. Their advocacy project included appealing to Gov. Bob Ferguson to negotiate a deal so that outside agencies can partner with the state to operate the facility, instead of relying on the state's budget in tight fiscal times. With signatures from nine elected officials representing both parties, family

advocates and public officials shared the letter with Gov. Ferguson and met with his staff on December 1, 2025.

A tour of the Brockmann campus in November 2025 enabled advocates and officials to appreciate the waste if this state-of-the-art facility remains empty, as the state has proposed, with two years of funding appropriated (\$600,000) to guard the unused buildings and maintain their pristine landscaping.

"This facility is nicer than any place my son ever stayed," said advocate Jerri Clark, whose son, Calvin Clark, was born and raised within a few miles of Brockmann. Calvin died from his SMI in 2019, after multiple hospitalizations, incarcerations, and periods of homelessness. Clark now works as Resource and Advocacy Manager for TAC. "Seeing those beds sitting empty while individuals and families suffer is unfathomable waste, and we are doing everything we can to make sure Brockmann opens within 2026," she said.

*Washington State Sen. Paul Harris (left), Rep. Carolyn Eslick (white jacket), and Rep. John Ley (right) joined family advocates (left to right) Janet Asbridge, Jerri Clark, and Andy Prater, to tour the Brockmann Residential Treatment Center in rural Clark County, Washington, Nov. 3, 2025.*



# Advocacy Bootcamp Alumni in Action

TAC hosted an alumni gathering on October 29, 2025 for Advocacy Bootcamp participants from the Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 sessions. The event provided an opportunity to reconnect, share progress, and reflect on where advocates are on their journeys. TAC staff remain committed to supporting alumni in their grassroots advocacy efforts and encourage participants to reach out with questions or for assistance with initiatives in their state at [advocacy@tac.org](mailto:advocacy@tac.org).

## Here are a few of their stories:

**David and Lisa Doerner** are Indiana-based mental health advocates whose work is rooted in lived family experience and a shared commitment to improving outcomes for people with serious mental illness and their caregivers. They are very involved with NAMI (Indiana and Greater Indianapolis) and the National Shattering Silence Coalition, serving in leadership, policy, and advocacy roles and volunteering with programs such as Family-to-Family and NAMI In the Lobby. Since completing Advocacy Bootcamp in Spring 2025, their advocacy has become more structured and policy-focused, strengthening their ability to engage legislators, build coalitions, and translate lived experience into meaningful system-level change.

*Advocates David and Lisa Doerner at Indiana State Capital in Indianapolis.*



## What is Advocacy Bootcamp?

Advocacy Bootcamp is a 15-session virtual, interactive training designed for advocates who want to engage in SMI advocacy but aren't sure where to begin. The program breaks complex policy and advocacy topics into accessible, easy-to-understand lessons while connecting participants with a nationwide community of emerging advocates. Sessions meet twice weekly for eight weeks.

### Advocacy Bootcamp topics:

- Advocacy 101
- SMI basics
- Full continuum of care
- Involuntary treatment and medication over objection
- IMD exclusion
- State hospital beds and competency restoration
- AOT and mental health courts
- Homelessness and housing solutions
- Research and evidence-based practices
- Cannabis / THC
- Care partner engagement
- Medication access
- Legislative advocacy
- Opposition arguments
- Putting it all together: Crafting a compelling advocacy narrative

If you are interested in participating in Advocacy Bootcamp in 2026, please email [advocacy@tac.org](mailto:advocacy@tac.org) to be added to the interest list.

Since participating in Advocacy Bootcamp in Fall 2024, **Christine Wirbick** has had the privilege of collaborating with five other women in Pennsylvania to establish the PA-National Shattering Silence Coalition. Together, they are working to incorporate “psychiatric deterioration” language into the current Mental Health Procedures Act. She has also joined the board of her local behavioral health administration, where she is hopeful about initiating an AOT program by 2027. Additionally, she’s been involved in planning her county’s legislative breakfast and was invited to speak at this year’s event. She regularly attends Prison Board meetings and has engaged with the warden to advocate for improved treatment for individuals with serious mental illnesses in jail.



*Advocate Christine Wirbick from Pennsylvania with advocate Beth Wallace and Nina Richtman*

## A Broad Coalition Comes Together for AOT in Massachusetts

For several years, advocates in Massachusetts have worked tirelessly to pass legislation authorizing assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) for people living with severe mental illness (SMI). Their persistence reflects a growing recognition that individuals need access to effective and timely outpatient treatment options.

Frustrated by limited progress, Massachusetts residents Vinita and Ashoke Ramporia took decisive action by engaging Shawmut Strategies Group, with Shawn Duhamel serving as lead lobbyist. Together, they launched *AOT Now*, built a dedicated website, and began organizing advocates and building broad-based coalitions to strengthen support for this critical legislation. They have had many meetings with Shawn and key legislators to advocate for the needed changes.

TAC staff, including Executive Director Lisa Dailey, Senior Legislative and Policy Counsel Sabah Muhammad, and Legislative Advocacy Manager Leslie Carpenter, have actively supported these efforts by providing guidance, education, and testimony throughout the process.

Ann Corcoran, Executive Director of the National Shattering Silence Coalition and a Massachusetts resident, has also played a key role in this



*Vinita and Ashoke Rampuria founders of AOT Now (bottom left) and Louis Calla, MA advocate and Advocacy Bootcamp alumnus (bottom right) providing testimony for S.1115 on November 18, 2025, at the Massachusetts Capitol.*

collaborative work. She has helped expand coalition partnerships, met with legislators, and educated mental health officials across the state about the need for AOT.

This year's legislation, **S.1115 / H.1801**, sponsored by Senator Cindy Friedman and Representative Bradley Jones, was assigned to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary and received a hearing on November 18 alongside 40 other bills.

Advocates worked intentionally to broaden testimony at the hearing, ensuring voices from across the spectrum were represented. Oral testimony was provided by people with lived experience with SMI and AOT, family members, psychiatrists, mental health professionals, and a medical student researching anosognosia. Written testimony was also submitted by professionals with AOT experience in other states and individuals with lived experience from across the country.

Over 200 people signed up to testify on 41 bills that afternoon. The response to the AOT testimony was encouraging. While additional work remains, including targeted meetings with key legislators in both chambers, feedback from the hearing has been positive.

**We are grateful to the many advocates who shared their stories and expertise and remain hopeful about the bill's prospects this session.**

The bill is currently in the Judiciary Committee. We hope for it to be passed favorably and continue passing through the legislative process and passed into law before session ends in 2026. If you live in Massachusetts, please consider writing to your state legislators and encouraging them to pass this legislation.

# Healing Minds NOLA Conference on SMI and Homelessness

Nina Richtman and Leslie Carpenter attended the Healing Minds NOLA Conference, “Crisis to the Streets: Untreated Mental Illness Fuels Homelessness” on Saturday, December 6, 2025 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Executive Director Janet Hays of Healing Minds NOLA brought together experts from across the country on solutions to the SMI homelessness crisis, local SMI advocates in Louisiana who are professionals working in this space, people with lived

experience, and family members. The conversations were rich, with space and time provided for people to share their viewpoints and testimony from families affected that grounded everyone in the depth of the crisis.

It is heartening to see new advocates getting involved and being provided the opportunity to share their stories, learn from others, and to help with solutions!

*Leslie Carpenter, Nina Richtman, and Lynda Kaufmann enjoyed catching up and hearing about Lynda's work at Psynergy in California, which continues to grow and serve more people living with SMI and complex needs.*



*Group photo of Healing Minds NOLA conference speakers and participants on December 6, 2025.*



# Grassroots Advocacy to Improve State Hospital in Florida

Patients Not Prisoners (PNP), a Florida-based advocacy organization focused on SMI, hosted its “Evening of Compassion Gala and Concert” on October 17, 2025, at the Marywood Retreat Center in St. Johns, Florida. The event brought the community together to create a supportive, healing space for individuals and families affected by mental illness.

The gala comes at a critical time. Florida’s state-run mental health facilities are facing significant challenges following severe budget cuts, including at the Florida Mental Health Hospital, which serves more than 600 individuals with SMI. These cuts have greatly limited the hospital’s ability to provide the level of care patients deserve.

PNP has “adopted” the facility, directing funds raised from the gala toward urgent improvements, including the creation of a Peace Park to offer patients and staff a calming space for rest and renewal; the renovation of the aging visitors center to provide free accommodations for families who cannot afford nearby lodging; and support for staff and clients through morale- and motivation-building events across state mental hospitals, assisted living facilities, and drop-in centers.

More than 200 people attended the event, helping PNP raise over \$60,000 toward its \$100,000 goal. The fundraising campaign will continue through March 2026. TAC applauds PNP’s leadership and shares this story in hopes of inspiring advocates nationwide.

Learn more at <https://www.patientsnotprisoners.org/>.



*Welcome sign from the “Evening of Compassion” event. Photo shared courtesy of PNP.*

## Stories That Couldn’t Stay Silent: The Sandy Pruett Project

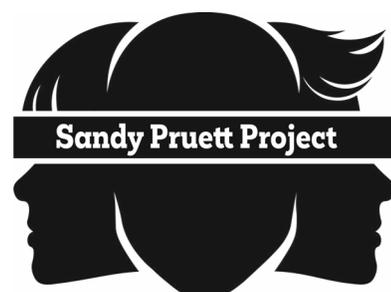
The Sandy Pruett Project is a new, online, family-led advocacy initiative created out of heartbreak, silence, and too many unanswered pleas for help. Behind every data point is a real family fighting for a loved one’s chance at lifesaving care.

The initiative was started to give families a safe place to speak honestly (and anonymously) about untreated SMI. The project lifts up their experiences without requiring names or risking repercussions.

These stories lay bare the human cost of system failure. We know that personal testimony can shift hearts, shape understanding, and move policymakers

to act, so we applaud their work in building this essential repository.

For more information or to share your story, please visit: [Sandy Pruett Project](#).



# Actions Advocates Can Take



**Sign up for TAC newsletters:** SMI Advocate, Research Briefly, Catalyst, AOT Learning Network

[Join Our Newsletters - Treatment Advocacy Center](#)



**Join TAC grassroots networks:** Networks for systems advocacy and resources

**National:**

[SMI Advocates of Treatment Advocacy Center | Facebook](#)

**Maryland:**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/tacmd>

**California:**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/catac>



**Watch the TAC webinar “How to Become a Severe Mental Illness Advocate” on YouTube.**

In this Zoom webinar, TAC advocacy staff provides training for grassroots advocates.

<https://www.youtube.com/@taccommunicate/videos>



**Sign up for TAC Action Center alerts:**

Check out active campaigns and initiatives here and write to your representatives via TAC Action Center.

<https://www.tac.org/tac-action-center/>



**Reach out to your legislators.**

Write to your legislators to encourage them to support legislation that improves treatment access for people with SMI.

Find your legislator(s) here:

<https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>



**If you are interested in attending our next session of Advocacy Bootcamp,**

email [advocacy@tac.org](mailto:advocacy@tac.org) to join the 2026 interest list.

# Legislative Recap

Legislative advocacy gained momentum across the country in 2025, fueled by the commitment of advocates and policymakers working to strengthen treatment for people with severe mental illness (SMI).



97

advocacy alerts were sent out.



6,628

emails were sent to legislators via TAC's portal.



1,824

different advocates sent emails to legislators.



67

bills tracked by TAC were enacted in 2025.



26

states passed bills tracked by TAC.

## Legislative Wins Expanding Access to Treatment

We are highlighting a few bills that have passed in 2025 which should help to allow for earlier access to treatment.



### Advocacy spotlight:

This effort was led by grassroots SMI advocates across Oregon, with support from TAC's Advocacy team, coordinated by Jerri Clark, and in collaboration with partners including NAMI Oregon.

### What changed:

[HB2005](#) updates Oregon's civil commitment law by clarifying when a person may be found in need of treatment, including when they pose a danger to themselves or others or cannot meet basic personal needs due to mental illness. The law also adds chronic mental disorder as a new pathway to treatment when repeated hospitalizations and ongoing deterioration are present.

### Why it matters:

The law allows courts to intervene earlier, before crises escalate, while prioritizing voluntary and outpatient treatment when appropriate.

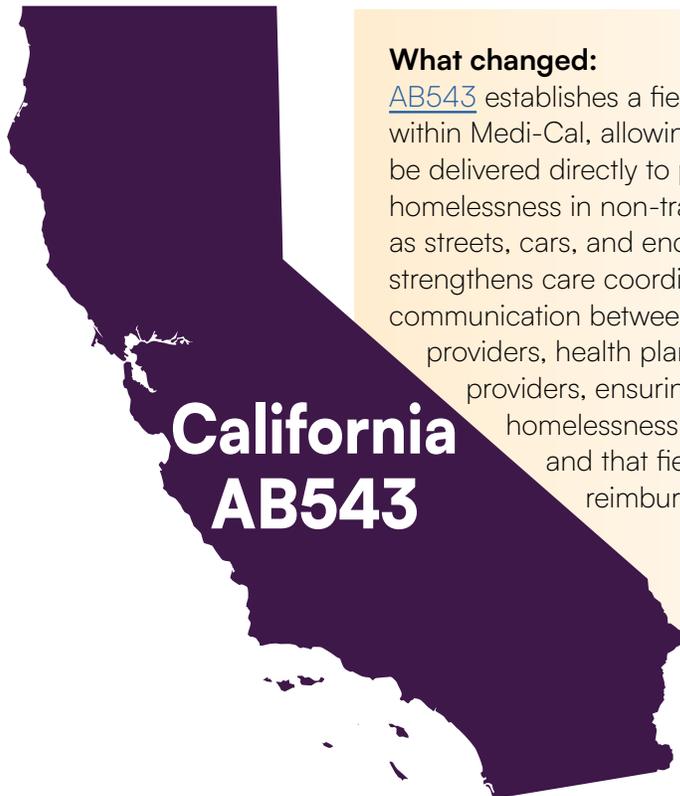


**What changed:**

[SB 1164](#) expands the criteria for emergency mental health detention to include severe emotional distress, deterioration of mental condition, and inability to recognize the need for treatment — common challenges for individuals experiencing anosognosia.

**Why it matters:**

By modernizing detention and treatment standards and strengthening documentation requirements, the law provides a more realistic and humane framework for responding to mental health crises.



**What changed:**

[AB543](#) establishes a field medicine framework within Medi-Cal, allowing medical care to be delivered directly to people experiencing homelessness in non-traditional settings such as streets, cars, and encampments. The bill strengthens care coordination by requiring communication between field medicine providers, health plans, and primary care providers, ensuring people experiencing homelessness can identify their status and that field medicine services are reimbursed by the state.

**Why it matters:**

This bill addresses severe health disparities by expanding access to care for one of the most vulnerable populations, many of whom live with untreated mental illness.

## Looking ahead

All these bills passed with the help of dedicated grassroots SMI advocates, demonstrating what can happen when a group of people work collaboratively with lawmakers to pass helpful legislation. To see a full list of bills that passed in 2025, please follow this [link](#). We look forward to the upcoming 2026 legislative sessions across the country.

Please reach out to us at [advocacy@tac.org](mailto:advocacy@tac.org) if you have questions or would like help with legislation you are hoping to get introduced and passed.