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August 7, 2003

Ron Abrams
Speaker Pro Tempore
585 State Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Re: Psychiatric Rights

Dear Speaker Pro Tempore Abrams:

I trust this letter finds you and your family well. After all of these years, I have occasion to write you. I have been contacted by a couple of Minnesotans about abuses in your court system around forced psychiatric medication and I hope that when they contact you, you could hear them out. Their names are Louise Bouta and Jerri Lynn.

By way of background, a few years after law school I got myself into a situation where I didn't sleep for a few days and became psychotic. This will happen to anyone with enough sleep deprivation. I ended up in the state psychiatric hospital where I was medicated with a Thorazine class of drug, and told I would have to take it or something like it for the rest of my life. Staff who believed me when I informed them I was a lawyer told me I would never practice law again. The consistent message I received from mental health workers was a normal life for me was over. I resisted the idea (called "denial"), got better and have been advocating off and on on mental health issues in various capacities, including legal, ever since. About a year ago, I read a new book called *Mad in America: Bad Science, Bad Medicine and the Enduring Mistreatment of the Mentally Ill* by Robert Whitaker. Mr. Whitaker was a science/medical writer for the Boston Globe and before that was the publications editor for Harvard Medical School. *Mad in America* makes what I believe is an incontrovertible case that these medications, as a whole, are destroying vast numbers of lives and preventing recovery from what would otherwise be a transitory mental health problem (like I had). I have always felt I was lucky not to have been made mentally ill by the system, but I didn't know how very close I came until reading *Mad in America* and a couple of other books.

I find it outrageous, frankly, that our courts are used to force people to ingest these harmful medications based on fraudulent claims about their safety and

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effectiveness. I don't expect you to take my word for this, which is why I have enclosed a copy of *Mad in America*, which I hope you can find time to read. The truly tragic truth revealed is that we are taking from half to two thirds of the people who could fully recover from their mental problems and making them permanently disabled by our insistence on these drug treatments.

Even though I know mental health is not one of your primary areas of legislative work *per se*, the logical conclusion of these scientific findings is if the proven alternatives to drug treatment for mental problems were employed, there would be a substantial savings to the government. The way things work now, once someone gets caught up in the mental health system and put on these drugs, they will most often become permanently financially dependent on the government for both basic living and medical/mental treatment expenses. Since the research shows at least half and up to two thirds of these people could fully recover, many to become tax paying citizens, taking this approach would substantially reduce the fiscal burden on government.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I would love to hear from you.

Yours truly,

/s/

James B. Gottstein, Esq.

cc: Louise Bouta
Jerri Lynn