

My name is Amy Lyden, and I am here on behalf of NAMI Colorado and the Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council.

I am a peer specialist, and social worker. I have worked successfully in the Behavioral Health Field for 15 years. I am also a spouse, dog mom, auntie, homeowner, and advocate. I do not think that any of these things would have been possible for me if it wasn't for ECT, which is why I encourage your support on HB 1087.

It is common knowledge that people with depression experience it differently. For me, depression is not an emotional state. I don't feel sad...in fact I don't feel much of anything. When I experience a deep depressive state it is a very cognitive experience. I can't think. I can't form sentences. I can't ask for what I need. I am a body without a personality. Depression robs me of my voice, my hopes, my fears, my joys, my support system and so many other things.

I first experienced this when I was 18 years old, and by my 19th birthday, I was in a psychiatric hospital. I had stopped talking, and other than my basic bodily functions, I couldn't do anything. It is almost hard to describe what it was like to sit still for hours and hours on end with a blank mind, wanting so bad to think, speak, care, scream....something, and being completely unable to make my brain do it. Medications and therapies made me thirsty, hungry, and more tired, but none of them could bring back the things that make me human. My body was there, but nothing else that made me me.

A psychiatrist recommended ECT. I was willing to try anything, but I couldn't express that. My parents were afraid, but also willing to try anything that could bring me back. I was 19 when I went through the first round of ECT treatments. After about a week (3-4 treatments), I started to talk again for the first time in months. Not long after that, I laughed for the first time in what seemed like centuries to me. Over the next couple months, medications started to work, I could participate in therapy and use skills. I could think, feel and be again.

People always ask me about the side effects. I cannot speak for everyone in this regard, but for myself, the side effects were limited. I have honestly had worse side effects to several medications. Treatments would happen early in the morning. The treatment itself is painless. Afterward, I would have a mild headache, and feel tired. Typically a nap would take care of both of these things. I did have some short term memory loss (like I couldn't remember what I ate for breakfast that morning), but this was temporary, and I did not lose any of my long term memories or any particular skills.

Those that know me today have a difficult time imagining me in that state. I am generally articulate, and unafraid to speak my mind. I am proud of the life that I have built for myself despite living with a mental health disorder. My recovery is always a work in progress, and I continue to grow and learn. I had two rounds of ECT (the first at age 19, and another at age 21), and have not needed additional ECT treatments since. I continue to see a therapist and take medication, and though I have had milder relapses with severe depression, I have not returned to that nearly catatonic state. If that were to happen, my family is well aware that ECT would be my treatment of choice.