

Potentially Preventable Tragedies in SF since Laura's Law was passed

Following is a list of some tragedies in San Francisco involving persons with serious mental illness since Laura's Law was passed. All involve individuals with very serious mental illness, most of whom were believed to be off treatment for their illness. In most cases the persons with mental illness are the perpetrators, in some cases, they may have been victims. Some of these tragedies may have been prevented had the Supervisors implemented Laura's Law which allows courts to order certain individuals (only those with a past history of arrest or violence due to going off treatment) to accept treatment as a condition of living in the community. In addition to preventing the tragedies, San Francisco would have saved the massive police, court, attorney, incarceration, and liability charges that come from using the police to do the job the mental health system should be doing. Note that SF need not set up a separate Laura's Law program, they can simply-as Nevada County did--let the most seriously ill into the programs SF already has in place.

On 5/12/2004, Avi Langer, 33, a man with mental illness who was not taking medication, reportedly took a valuable scroll from the Torah off the wall of his parents' bedroom and lit it on fire. He was diagnosed 10 years earlier with severe schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, had been in and out of treatment and on and off the streets of San Francisco since he stopped taking his medication nine years ago. Langer's parents said they had called 911 on their son at least five times over the last nine years, since it was the only way to force him to receive hospital treatment and take his medication. The Langers knew their son frequently went off his medication (and had done so recently). At the advice of a psychologist, they found ways to trigger angry outbursts from him, and then called the police. Once incarcerated, their son was forced to take his medication and undergo therapy. "We've been forced into this situation. I feel my son has been criminalized by this system ... Police are now our surrogate mental health system," said Hinda Langer. Source: SF Examiner, May 14, 2004 San Francisco Jewish Bulletin of Northern California, May 21, 2004

On 10/19/2005, OLashaun Harris, a 23-year-old woman with schizophrenia, stripped her three children and threw them off the end of Pier 7 in San Francisco. Harris' family said she had not been taking her medication the past few months and had begun hearing voices. Source: Oakland Tribune, 10/21/05, 11/13/06, 11/14/06; Tacoma News Tribune, 10/21/05; Asheboro Courier Times, 10/21/05; WNBC-TV, 10/21/05; San Francisco Chronicle, 10/20/05, 9/22/06

On 12/29/2010, 46-year-old Vinh Bui stabbed a 15-year-old girl with a scalpel. Police and family members said Bui had a long history of mental illness. Officers entered the home, and when Bui still holding the scalpel refused commands to drop it and approached officers, they opened fire. Bui was pronounced dead at the hospital. Source: SF Examiner, 12/30/10, 1/2/11; SFWeekly.com, 12/30/10

On 10/3/2011, 44-year-old Peter Woo fatally stabbed his mother, 73-year-old Nina Woo, and wounded his father, 78-year-old Dennis Woo. Woo's brother said that his brother had a long history of mental illness. Brandishing a knife in each hand, Woo confronted responding officers who were trying to pull his mother to safety. After a beanbag weapon failed to stop him, an officer shot Woo. Police found Woo's 50-year-old sister hiding in the back of the house. She was unharmed. Source: SFGate.com, 10/4/11; SF Examiner, 10/5/11; SF Appeal, 10/18/11

On 10/14/2007, 30-year-old Zachary Sebring of San Francisco committed suicide by stepping in front of a Municipal Railway bus. Relatives of Sebring told police he had a history of mental illness and previously tried to throw himself under a bus. Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 10/15/07

On 5/18/2003, Aaron Matthew Hull, 33, assaulted Dr. Geetha Jayaram, an associate professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of

Medicine. He was knocked unconscious during the assault and spent the week recovering at SF General Hospital. Hull is homeless and has a history of mental illness. A judge ruled that Hull was incompetent to stand trial and sent him to a state mental hospital. He was forced to take medication which made him more coherent. Hull had been placed in facilities 22 times in that previous year alone. He would sometimes go AWOL and was no longer welcome at some places because of his physical aggression. His treatment team called the prognosis for improvement poor. Despite the severity of his illness, just five months after the report on his prognosis, the same treatment team said Hull had a miraculous recovery. The County of San Mateo terminated Hull's conservatorship, and sent him to a hotel in the Tenderloin, where he visited the emergency room at SF General Hospital six times and asked to be sent to a locked facility. His requests were denied. Source: SF Chronicle, May 23, 2003 KPIX-TV 5, CA, May 18, 2004

On 5/14/2003, John Kahler, 32, who had a history of mental illness, jumped to his death off the Golden Gate Bridge. In 1994, Kahler was diagnosed with manic depression with paranoid episodes, suicidal tendencies and depression, according to his father, David Kahler. Kahler had been arrested at least four times over a 10 year period for crimes ranging from drunken driving to assaulting a judge in court. Judges ordered treatment as a condition of probation, but court records show that Kahler walked away repeatedly from inpatient programs. Source: SF Chronicle, May 21, 2003, June 11, 2003; Contra Costa Times, 9/23/03/03

On 6/38/03, John Bravard gunned down three fellow tenants and critically wounded a fourth at the Dalt Hotel in the Tenderloin district. Police say Bravard had a history of mental illness. Bravard later went to his fourth-floor room and fatally shot himself. Source: SF Chronicle, 6/30/03

On 10/15/0, John Gimbel, 59, was indicted by a federal grand jury in The City after making dozens of threats against Obama and other public officials in e-mails that spanned more than two years, according to court papers. During a previous visit to his home, Secret Service agents interviewed one of his sisters, who said Gimbel was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Gimbel owns several guns. In April 2004, Gimbel was accused of making threats in an e-mail complaining about a \$5 parking ticket, saying he would deputize "all of the citizens of Crescent City. ... Grab those high-powered deer rifles, each and every, and get in groups of 50 and more and go breeze away to dust the skull of the police chief." Source: SF Examiner, 10/16/09

On 10/12/09, Charlie Foniloa Sekona fatally stabbed 49-year-old Eric Buschman outside his home as Buschman unloaded camping gear after a weekend trip to Mount Shasta. Authorities said there is no indication the men knew each other and no apparent reason for the killing. Rev. Fusifuka "Charlie" Sekona, said his son has schizophrenia and hears

voices. Sekona was found mentally unfit to stand trial when a court-appointed doctor found that Sekona suffers from paranoid schizophrenia. Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 10/27/09, 5/26/10

On 5/9/11, Rageh Almurisi attempted to bust into the cockpit of a San Francisco-bound jetliner. Passengers helped tackle and subdue Almurisi as the plane was preparing to land. He was found mentally incompetent to stand trial. Source: San Mateo County Times, 12/9/11

On 9/28/08, 47-year-old Audrey Jackson, a homeless individual diagnosed with schizophrenia, shot 54-year-old Francisco Salvador Perez. A judge sentenced the 50-year-old Jackson to a state mental hospital. Jackson, diagnosed with schizophrenia, had been estranged from her family for years. Source: San Francisco Sentinel.com, 9/22/08; Sacramento Bee, 7/24/11

On 3/22/11, 32-year-old Anthony Pacrem brutally beat 59-year-old Sherman Brown. A judge ruled that Pacrem was incompetent to stand trial. The case had been delayed over 17 different times as Pacrem underwent psychiatric evaluation. Pacrem's Public Defender said Pacrem had a long history of mental illness. Source: SanFrancisco.CBSLocal.com, 5/4/11; SF Appeal, 9/22/11

On 9/26/10, Police were responding to a complaint at a residential hotel for seniors and the mentally ill entered the room of 43 year old Michael Lee, who had a history of mental illness and drug abuse. A confrontation ensued and the officer fired several shots, killing Lee. The police declined to comment on what may have provoked the shooting, except to say that Lee was armed. Lee's death raised new questions about the use of excessive force and concerns that the San Francisco police department is being forced to become a shadow mental health system to help those who are left to fend for themselves by the mental health system. Source: SF Examiner, 9/28/10; New York Times, 10/14/10

On August 7, 2008, police responded to a report from a social worker that Teresa Sheehan threatened him. The officers entered her Mission District apartment to check on her mental welfare and after brandishing a steak knife was shot by the officers. Her family says Sheehan has suffered from schizophrenic symptoms for much of her life. District Attorney Kamala Harris' office charged Sheehan with two counts of assault on a police officer and two counts of assault with a deadly weapon. The report provoked outrage by those who felt police used excessive force and outrage by those who wondered why the mental health system allowed her to go untreated.

In October 2002, 28-year-old Jihad Alim Akbar walked into an Oakland restaurant, grabbed two butcher knives from the kitchen and began dancing and waving the knives over his head while muttering about God's retribution upon gays and minorities. Police approached him and asked him several times to put down the weapons. Akbar then allegedly charged the officers and was shot twice in the chest. Akbar had a long history of mental illness, had been arrested four times in recent years, had been on probation for both battery and drug charges and had a previous conviction for resisting arrest. Source: SF Chronicle, October 10, 2002

On March 3, 2003, Jerry Lucas, 25, a man with bipolar disorder, allegedly beat a pregnant woman in her San Francisco home. Lucas, according to his mother, has struggled with bipolar disorder since his late teens. Lucas was seen ringing doorbells the day of the attack. One man said that Lucas complained he was losing his mind. Police were dispatched to check on him and eventually took him to San Francisco General Hospital. It was

there they made the connection between a pregnant woman being treated for a severe head injury in a trauma room and the man being led into the psychiatric ward. Lucas' mother said he did well while on medication. Source: San Francisco Chronicle, March 10, 2003

On May 10, 2003, Casey Dillingham, 20, stabbed his 60-year-old stepmother, Phyllis Jackson, in the backyard of their San Francisco home more than 25 times. Authorities said Casey Dillingham tried to dismember Jackson. Authorities said Casey Dillingham was fascinated by violent Ninja computer games and may suffer from schizophrenia. His family committed him last year to a treatment center and was exploring further action in the days before the attack, investigators said. Source: SF Chronicle - May 13, 2003

On October 19, 2005, Lashaun Harris, a 23-year-old woman with schizophrenia, stripped her three children and threw them off the end of Pier 7. Harris' family said she had not been taking her medication the past few months and had begun hearing voices. Harris, an Oakland resident, suffered from schizophrenia for two years and told police officers voices told her to put her children in the Bay. Prior History: Police confirmed that Harris was detained in February 2004 for psychiatric evaluation. She was taken to John George again in March 2004 for erratic behavior. In January 2005, Harris voluntarily checked into John George for about a month. In July 2005, Harris was again taken to John George, and in fact had called police herself, saying she had not taken her medication and was hearing voices. On January 17, 2007, LaShuan Harris, 24, was declared criminally insane by a judge who spared her a possible life sentence. Source: Oakland Tribune, 10/21/05, 11/13/06, 11/14/06; Tacoma News Tribune, 10/21/05; Asheboro Courier Times, 10/21/05; WNBC-TV, 10/21/05; San Francisco Chronicle, 10/20/05, 9/22/06

On 5/14/06, Christopher Coleman, 41, attacked his mother with a hammer and fractured her skull. Police said Coleman told them he was hearing voices that were calling him names. "He was telling them to stop and things got out of hand," said Inspector Gianrico Pierucci of the domestic violence detail. The victim told police that her son was supposed to be on medication, and that she knew he was hearing things. Source: San Francisco Chronicle, May 18, 2006

In February 2008, a three-judge panel upheld a restraining order against Han Shin, 43, who appeared to be stalking San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom while wearing a purple latex glove. He had talked his way into Mayor Gavin Newsom's apartment building shortly after midnight. Han Shin acknowledged receiving treatment for bipolar disorder, was arrested in November, 2006 for threatening to kill his mother, and had numerous contacts with Union City police in the past 10 to 12 years. Most recently, on November 9, Shin threatened to kill his 76-year-old mother and trapped his 80-year-old father inside his house, by standing in front of the door, "hunched over in an aggressive manner with his hands clenched in fists." Shin's parents obtained multiple restraining orders against Shin. Source: Mercury News, 2/28/07; Asian Week, 2/13/08

On May 18, 2007, Scott Thomas entered a bakery near Miraloma Park, where he attacked Loren Schaller with a hunting knife stabbing her in the head, wrist, leg, back and neck. 60-year-old Kermit Kubitz came to her rescue and was repeatedly stabbed in the chest. The previous day Thomas who suffers from bipolar had been released from San Quentin without a requirement to stay in treatment. He was sent to prison nine times for nonviolent crimes between 2000 and 2007 and was declared mentally incompetent to stand trial and incarcerated at Atascadero State Hospital. Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 3/28/08; SF Examiner, 2/11