

STATE LAW GIVES THE MENTALLY ILL \ THE RIGHT TO REFUSE TREATMENT

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Under **state law**, society can be protected from **mentally ill** people who either threaten violence or commit dangerous acts.

But **the** often-overburdened mental health system also tries to strike a balance that safeguards **the rights** of people with mental illness to refuse treatment.

Charles Knowles, who was killed Monday after he shot two police officers during a standoff at his apartment on Springle Avenue, had been involuntarily committed to mental institutions at least six times since 1969. He was released each time after his condition was stabilized with medication, but apparently refused to continue treatment.

Psychiatric help in Wayne County is generally obtained two ways for people who may not believe they need it:

* **The mentally ill** person is taken for a diagnosis to Detroit Receiving Hospital's crisis center or **the** Psychiatric Intervention Center.

* If **the** person will not go, anyone at least 18 years old who witnesses bizarre or dangerous behavior can petition a probate court judge to order that person committed for a psychiatric evaluation.

The petition must describe signs of mental illness plus evidence **the** person is a danger to himself or others.

"If God told him to go and stand on **the** roof and preach, that's dangerous to himself," said one Wayne County Probate Court official who asked not to be identified. "If God told him to stand on **the** street corner and preach, that's not."

Petitioners must go before a probate court judge and testify about **the** mental illness and danger.

If **the** judge decides there is evidence **the** person is **mentally ill** and is a danger to himself or others, **the** judge signs an order allowing **the** police to take **the** individual to a psychiatric facility.

Once **the** order is signed, petitioners can call 911 in Detroit to have **the** police detain **the** person. Such orders usually are valid for 10 days.

Crisis centers or other psychiatric facilities have 24 hours to evaluate **the** person. If professionals decide further treatment is needed, a court hearing must be held within seven days.

An attorney is appointed and must confer with **the** allegedly **mentally ill** person at least 24 hours before **the** hearing.

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