

**KARA GARVEY
TESTIMONY TO VERMONT HOUSE JUDICIARY
COMMITTEE (Extended Remarks)
JANUARY 15, 2026**

Good afternoon. My name is Kara Garvey and I am Scott Garvey's sister. I want to thank you for providing this space to share my truth about my brother and what was lost when he was taken from me at the hands of the Vermont state police. It is my hope that this time matters and that changes will happen, that my brother mattered to others as much as he matters to his family, friends, and beloved dogs.

Scott was my best friend. He was two years older than me. As kids, he would always let me play with him and his friends- we would run around in the woods all day playing army. We had a trove of stuffed animals that we created a whole world around- stories for each one- biographies written on index cards, specific voices for each bear or monkey, and countless hours of imagining their lives.

We loved to write research reports based on topics we found in our set of encyclopedias. We presented our findings to our parents. We felt very professional.

Scott and I spent hours with our matchbox cars, our Adventure People, and our Atari video games.

As teenagers, Scott was busy with his friends and his band- he was an incredibly talented drummer. His adventures began with moving to Boston. Throughout the years he traveled widely- living in very cool places- San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oregon, Austin, New Orleans...I was living at home

and spinning my wheels. Scott came back to visit and listening to his adventures lit a fire under me. He introduced me to more: good literature- one of his favorite books was Man's Search for Meaning; good movies- A River Runs Through It, Shawshank Redemption, Cinema Paradiso; and good music- too many to list- Cowboy Junkies, John Coltrane, John Gorka, Neko Case...

Scott showed me a different way to live- one where awe and beauty and artistry and dreaming and creativity lived. He taught me how to think bigger than where I was planted. And, because of him, I left my hometown to see what was out in the world- and I am forever grateful. He changed the trajectory of my life.

Scott and I would call each other every day. Each morning I would wake up to a text from him- sometimes he didn't feel well and needed strength- and some days I did.

Scott wrote me letters and postcards. Always encouraging me and praying for my son, my husband, and me. He would sign off with a picture of him and his dogs and his drumset- Be well, dream harder, love more.

Scott was taken from me. His disability, criminalized. There is the discrimination: criminalizing mental health. He didn't need to die. It was unnecessary.

Days after July 7- when Scott was killed, a statement addressing Scott's murder was released by **Wilda White, one of the** founding directors of MadFreedom Advocates of Vermont.

Titled “Scott Garvey Did Not Need to Die”, she shares the following:

“We are outraged that this preventable death occurred despite the presence of a mental health professional on the scene, despite years of statewide policy development, and despite a widely publicized prior tragedy- the 2016 killing of Phil Grenon in circumstances that bear a chilling resemblance to this case.

In the wake of Mr. Grenon's death, the Vermont Mental Health Crisis Response Commission released an urgent set of recommendations aimed at preventing any future fatal encounters between law enforcement officers and individuals in emotional distress.

The state also adopted a comprehensive Statewide Use of Force Policy that includes specific guidelines for interacting with persons experiencing a mental health crisis. Taken together, the commission's report and the policy set out the following directives:

1. Avoid forced entry unless there is an imminent threat to others- let me repeat- Avoid forced entry unless there is an imminent threat to others- again, Avoid forced entry unless there is an imminent threat to others- nothing had changed in the five and a half hours they were there to have caused them to dress in tactical gear and forcefully enter my brother's home.
2. Use time, space, and containment to avoid confrontation
3. Allow embedded mental health professionals to lead crisis responses
4. Engage natural supports or known contacts to de-escalate the situation- when I asked a police officer if I could go to the door to talk with my brother, he said no. When I asked if I

could meet them at the hospital, he said no. He never once looked me in the eye.

5. Center the sanctity of life in every tactical decision- the sanctity of life- my brother was shot multiple times and did not make it. He was ultimately murdered by an untrained and overly confident.

These directives were not followed. Instead, police chose force over time, confrontation over compassion, and escalation over care. That is not just a policy failure. It is a moral failure. It is a moral failure to meet suffering with violence. It is a moral failure to treat disability as dangerous.

It is a moral failure to ignore the lessons of past tragedies and repeat them- with fatal consequences.

When the state responds to a call for help by delivering bullets instead of support, it tells the public, especially those with mental health challenges- that their lives are disposable. That their crises will be met with guns drawn.”

Data proves that 6% (1 in 20) of the US population is diagnosed with a severe mental illness and are disproportionately involved in police use-of-force incidents.

- 6% of the population are identified with a severe mental illness yet they make up about 17% of cases where police use force, and about 20% of those injured during police interactions.
- 6% and An estimated 25% of individuals with a severe mental illness have been arrested by police at some point.

Most people sharing their truth have some element of negative police interactions. Is anybody with power watching, questioning, or caring?

My point- having a mental illness is a crime to our police force. Our fragile community members are dying because of ill-trained police.

Many loving people ask me how I am doing.
So here it is:

Every morning I wake up ruminating- images of what my brother must have looked like when he was shot replay in my mind.
Falling back with terror in his eyes.

I have flashbacks of state police vehicles speeding south on 91 from Westminster when I was driving north the day my brother was murdered.

I can no longer spend time in Putney -a town next door to where I live. The distance I was so excited about when my brother moved.

I can't use Exit 4 North on 91 because I have to drive by my brother's driveway. If I want to go North, I have to drive south to get on Exit 3 in Brattleboro to then go north. When I drive south, I have to drive by several houses owned by state police. I have to look at their cruisers every day.

I no longer trust the police- I cancelled my alarm system because I do not want them coming to my home.

I question my belief in God- once so strong. Scott prayed all the time. He had a book where he wrote them down (SHARE his notebook)

I lost my mom- she wants to die and when she does, there is one less person who knows Scott and can share stories with me.

I am unable to return to work. I have been a special educator in VT schools since 1999- 26 years of advocating for childrens' rights- protecting them- including those with mental health issues.

I don't know if I can live in my town anymore- it is too difficult to be in my house- remembering the police at my door and watching my mom run out of the house and fall to the ground with her face in the grass- screaming "you killed my son" over and over and over again.

I lost the opportunity to spend more time with my brother- the trips we planned- to the beach, to music shows, to the movies.

I have lost out on new conversations about life, what it all means, God, love, and hope. I will never see another text from him again. No more phone calls. No more postcards. No more letters. No more jokes. No more laughter. No more love. My life with Scott is over.

In my grief group, I wrote this poem.

I miss you

I lost you, Scott.

As Mama would say you were her other bookend.

You were a traveler, a musician, a philosopher, a dreamer, an intellectual.

A kind, kind man.

I miss watching you play your drums.

A holy experience, indeed.

Your eyes would close and your head would tilt up- like a prayer.

Your sticks would slide back and forth from drum to cymbal

To drum, drum, drum.

I learned from you.

That walking saves you.

That dogs are from Heaven.

That dreams come true when you push past fear.

That family is everything.

I'm painfully grateful for you, brother.

Someday, we will sit together again and talk and laugh as we watch
our dogs happily frolic.

Someday, we will sit on a bench at twilight and watch as the sun
gently welcomes the night.