

CIVIL COMMITMENT: How Two Detainees from Minnesota Organized a Workshop in North Carolina

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By Daniel A. Wilson and Russell J. Hatton . . . On Saturday, June 18, 2022, the National Association for Rational Sexual Offense Laws (NARSOL) held their annual 2022 convention in Raleigh, North Carolina. Russell J. Hatton and I developed one of their workshops even though we are two detainees from one of the most draconian and egregious so-called commitment programs in the nation. How we managed to create a workshop for a national convention in another state is a lesson in determination and faith.

Before we even knew what NARSOL was, both Russell and I had developed an intense focus for freedom, making it our number one priority. We are both fathers, brothers, sons and uncles. We both feel an intense responsibility to do everything in our power to get home to our loved ones. Our focus on freedom occupies the majority of our time, energy and finances. From the moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed, freedom is on our minds... NOT treatment, NOT X-Box, NOT the women that work here... FREEDOM. Everything else is secondary. Developing our focus for freedom was the first step that led to the workshop in North Carolina.

After we began to focus on freedom, we discovered blatant corruption and malpractice at the institution. We shed light on these issues and began to ask shadow prison administrators for answers. When no honest answers were forthcoming, we organized peaceful protests that were attended by over 100

fellow detainees. The protesting had very little affect until shadow prison administration reacted.

When they blatantly retaliated with terrorizing oppression in response to our peaceful assemblies, journalists, civil rights advocates, and other supporters came out of the woodwork. When most of the men at the institution thought the movement was dead in the water, that is actually when waves of support came rushing in. One of those waves was NARSOL. This is when we were invited to coordinate a workshop to teach the public about why these shadow prisons must be abolished. Initially, we were overwhelmed by the idea. We obviously could not personally attend and were not sure if we could send anyone. However, we trusted in God to help us.



Our initial task was to find someone to physically go to North Carolina. We asked many supporters, but two months before the event, there were still no takers. Finally, about six weeks before the event, we found two individuals who volunteered to conduct our workshop. The first person was Professor Trevor Hoppe, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, North Carolina. We met Professor Hoppe after providing input on an academic article he co-authored for UCLA in 2020, "Civil Commitment of People Convicted of Sex Offenses in the United States." We are acknowledged at the end of that article for our input in the

final publication. This report was referenced by Senator Ted Cruz in the confirmation hearings of Ketanji Brown Jackson. It says something about Hoppe's work that the article would end up at the White House. Professor Hoppe is also the author of the book *Punishing Disease* and the co-author of another book, *The War on Sin*.

The second volunteer was Christian Doggett. Mr. Doggett is a member of NARSOL and has organized a support group called "Fearless" to provide a supportive community for persons who are required to register. We met Mr. Doggett after an anti-civil commitment rally held in St. Paul, Minnesota, in July 2021.

While Professor Hoppe only had to drive a few hours to get to the workshop, we needed to find travel funds for Mr. Doggett, who lives in Minneapolis. Round-trip plane tickets from Minneapolis to Raleigh were about \$385, but were projected to soar by the end of May. Time was not on our side, and we had only a few weeks to raise the money.

Fortunately, an angel advocate offered to loan the money for the plane ticket, which by that time had gone up to \$533. This particular angel advocate was not someone random. He is a fellow abolitionist who we worked with for over two years and built a professional relationship with. Because he had witnessed our integrity, and hard work towards the cause of abolishing SVP confinement, this individual felt comfortable lending the money. Every dime of our own money, and anything donated, goes directly to this cause.

Finding the money for the plane ticket was the easy part. From when the angel-advocate agreed to lend the \$500 to the time Mr. Doggett bought the plane ticket was just under three weeks. It took dozens of phone calls and text messages and even one make-shift ZOOM call to complete this critical element of the project. These gentlemen have lives, and yet they find room in their day for us. It's remarkable. Doing

this work reminds us that life is complicated in the real world. This work keeps us grounded and keeps us from becoming institutionalized.

After countless phone calls and months of preparation, it was finally the day of the workshop. When the workshop began, NARSOL founder Paul Shannon introduced Professor Hoppe first. Hoppe told the crowd that in Minnesota hearsay can be used to civilly commit anyone with a clean record. When the professor said that SVP commitment is indefinite, an audible gasp rose from the audience. The professor spoke about the racial and sexual-orientation disparities within SVP commitment, with African American and gay men more likely to be committed than any other demographic. Hoppe said that when it comes to SVP commitment, there are "baked-in homophobic standards." Hoppe also stated that the terms "mental abnormality," and "Paraphilia Not otherwise Specified," which are used to commit people, are not legitimate medical terms.

After Professor Hoppe concluded his presentation, he introduced NARSOL member Christian Doggett. Mr. Doggett took the conference attendees through the PowerPoint presentation that we wrote. He has a calm and personal presentation style that makes him easy to listen to.

In the presentation, Mr. Doggett described us as "SVP Civil Commitment Abolitionists." The presentation spoke on the two truths that motivate us: 1) Those who support SVP Civil Commitment support sexual violence because SVP Civil Commitment programs take billions of taxpayer dollars away from programs that actually prevent sexual violence in our communities. 2) SVP Civil Commitment is preventive detention, which flies in the face of the American value that we are all innocent until proven guilty. The presentation urged listeners to start similar movements to abolish SVP commitment in other states.

After Mr. Doggett's presentation, we called in to speak to the

audience. I spoke about how witnessing 32 deaths in 5 years has motivated me to find ways to create awareness. There has been a sharp rise in the death rate in last five years of the MSOP program. There were 61 deaths in the first 22 years; that is a death every 133 days. In contrast, there were 32 deaths in the last 5 years. That is a death every 57 days. Therefore, although the program has existed for 27 years, a third of the overall deaths have occurred in just the last 5 years.



I also spoke about when I met Russell. We had a conversation about whether or not SVP commitment was actually preventing sexual assault in Minnesota. It then became our primary focus to shed light on the ineffectiveness of SVP commitment and what should replace it. When I finished these remarks, I introduced Russell, who spoke about how in his Native tradition, he dances for those who cannot dance. He now fights for those who cannot fight. When Russell discovered that the shadow prison treatment program is not legitimate, he began to resist the institution. He quit treatment in 2013 and began studying neuroscience and psychology to find ways to help his peers at the institution. When the pandemic hit, Russell had time to study the DSM and law reviews that pertained to the medical aspects of SVP commitment. He then began to educate his peers. Naturally, other detainees raised the issue of misdiagnosis to facility staff.

When these legitimate concerns were ignored, we began to organize peaceful assemblies, hunger strikes, and protests. 566 people around the world heard our message – including a man from the Netherlands who, during the presentation, emailed

us and said, "I want to join. How can I help?" We are in communication with him now.

When we were asked to partner with NARSOL, we felt a high like no other. Speaking at the NARSOL conference on behalf of others is a real honor. We realize that we are not only speaking for those in the Minnesota Shadow Prison; we want to be a voice for the many preventively detained across our nation. We do not see ourselves as better than or less than; we see ourselves as equals to others. This is what makes us human.

When we need to refocus on our mission, we often go back to that first conversation we had about whether or not these institutions are protecting the public. We began this journey together with every thought rooted in empathy for victims of sexual assault and for the men confined. We have advanced this empathy into compassion, action, and a powerful movement. We will continue to condemn SVP commitment and promote effective prevention programs that actually protect our communities.

We seek to inspire detainees to discover their own unique ways of getting involved. At the risk of sounding harsh, we must be honest about something: When our peers believe that we are more capable than they are, they are giving themselves an excuse to do nothing.

I say that with love. All detainees have unique gifts they can utilize. None of us have any excuses. Guys would be amazed at just how much they are loved by our outside supporters. However, we cannot expect others to do more than we are willing to do. We must all lead the way.

Together, we will end SVP commitment across the nation. We are bringing dignity back to the mental health field and securing the freedom of Americans for future generations. We have supporters in the free world who arc more than to stand up for us, but only if we are willing to stand up for ourselves. Our

freedom is our responsibility, no one else's, and if we don't find ways to work together, we will die together.

There are two simple ways you can help advance this cause: First, encourage your friends and family members to become Facebook followers at [Facebook.com/endmsop](https://www.facebook.com/endmsop). These days, social media is one of the best ways to connect with likeminded people and to stay informed on future events for the cause. Second, donate to the cause at thevoicesofocean.net/donations. All proceeds are tax exempt and processed through a non-profit program.