

Testimony for the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, October 28, 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Criminal Justice Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to have the honor to testify as an interested party concerning Senate Bill 162. My name is Frederick J. Frese and I reside at 283 Hartford drive, Hudson, Ohio.

I am a former Marine Corps captain. During the Vietnam War I was given a medical discharge from the Marine Corps due to having been diagnosed with serious mental illness. During a decade spanning the 60's and 70's, I was hospitalized some ten times, mostly involuntarily. During this time I usually was given the diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. At one time, I was picked up in the street, here in Columbus, Ohio, brought before a court in the old Columbus State Hospital and was judicially determined to be insane and committed to the Ohio State hospital system. Despite this disability, for which I continue to be under treatment, I have been able to earn a doctorate in psychology and become licensed as a psychologist in the State of Ohio. Until my retirement, I served for fifteen years as the director of psychology at Western Reserve Psychiatric Hospital, now Northcoast Behavioral Healthcare, in the Cleveland-Akron area. I am currently a professor in the psychiatry department at the Northeast Ohio Medical University and a clinical faculty member in the psychiatry department at Case Western Reserve University. I am also a fellow in both the American Psychological Association and the American Psychopathological Association. I specialize in schizophrenia and am a member of the editorial board of *Schizophrenia Bulletin*.

During the past twenty-five years, I have been open and public about my psychiatric condition. I have given over 1000 presentations in 49 states and several foreign countries and have testified several times before the U. S. Congress.

During this time I have noticed that in general people who have not themselves been psychotic, often have a difficult time understanding what it is like to be in psychosis. This is the topic I would like to briefly address today.

Psychosis is frequently defined as a fundamental derangement of the mind, characterized by defective or lost contact with reality, especially evidenced by delusions, hallucinations, and disorganized speech and behavior. Although these terms may be objectively correct, I feel they do not fully capture what the experience is like for the individual in psychosis. Although it is obviously difficult to communicate to those who have not experienced psychosis, I find that the descriptions given by two well-known persons, who themselves [have been treated](#)

for schizophrenia, convey an understanding of the experience of psychosis that is much richer than descriptions usually found in texts.

I have had the honor of being on programs with both the late Professor John Nash, the protagonist in the film, *The Beautiful Mind*, and Elyn Saks, the USC Law School professor who is a MacArthur Award winner and is the author of the best-selling book, *The Center Cannot Hold*. Both these distinguished scholars, who have personally experienced psychosis, frequently have described their psychotic experiences as similar to “being in a dream.” Professor Saks has further characterized these dreams as being nightmares.

The descriptions of the experiences of psychosis by both Dr. Saks and the late Dr. Nash have had a significant impact on our understanding of the phenomenology of the psychotic experience during the recent past.

As a person who has also had these experiences, I would agree with Drs. Nash and Saks that “like being in a dream” is a useful metaphor for communication what it can be like to be in the state of psychosis. When one is dreaming, he or she sees and hears things that are not there. One may also see events or objects as having particular and unusual significance, or perceive things that are physically impossible.

It is my understanding that the question being considered with SB 162 is: “Should one who is in psychosis at the time they are engaging in a criminal act be subject to the death penalty?” I would suggest that if those considering this Bill realize that the person in question is in fact in a dream-like state when they are in psychosis, such awareness may render a better appreciation of the degree of culpability that should rightly be assigned to the person who has engaged in such criminal activity.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in this very important matter. I am glad to answer any questions you have at this time.

Fred Frese, Ph.D., FAPPA, FAPA