

JUDITH “MAMA J” GARVEY TESTIMONY TO

VERMONT HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

JANUARY 15, 2026

Good afternoon.

Thank you to the Vermont House Judiciary Committee for asking me here today.

My name is Judy Garvey. I am the proud mother of 3 children and 4 grandchildren. I am 84 years old, and I served my entire life as a nurse.

And I am in deep grief.

I am here to tell you today about my son Scott Joseph Garvey, who can longer speak or advocate for himself.

Scott was born on August 21, 1969, in Westfield, Massachusetts, He died on July 7, 2025, in our apartment in Putney, Vermont, after being shot multiple times by the Vermont State Police during a mental health crisis in which he reached out dozens of times for help. He was unarmed, alone, scared, and had recently undergone major surgery. He was both physically and mentally disabled, and required a cane to walk.

Scott was an inspired musician. He was an exceptional poet. He was a voracious reader, a traveller and a dreamer. He was impossibly kind, quick to laugh, and slow to judge. He loved people with deep loyalty and quiet fierceness, and he lived as though beauty and art and music and human connection were all that mattered.

Scott left behind songs and prayers, scribbled notebooks and poems on napkins. He left his beloved drums from around the world, and a notable generosity that was second to none. He also left behind hundreds of friends and family who loved him—and will never stop loving him. My only wish is that he could have known in life what has become obvious in his death: that people all over the world were moved and inspired by his tremendous compassion.

Scott was a devoted son, a loyal brother, and a treasured uncle to his nieces and nephews. He lived with and cared for me for much of his life. He brought me to hundreds of music concerts and art shows. I was the “mother” to many of his band mates who gathered in our house for band practice, and to this day most people call me “Mama J.” I miss those days so much and would do anything to have them back.

Just because we were poor didn't mean we didn't enjoy life. Scott and I walked our dogs for miles together, and we spent days upon days in thrift stores, where he loved finding a small treasure that he thought would put a smile on his sister Kara's face, or light up his nieces and nephews. Often, he would just want to drive to some faraway place he read about, just to see something interesting.

I loved listening to a newly discovered jazz musician with him. I loved listening to him come to Jesus and pray out loud each day for his family and friends, the homeless and hungry, and even the police and firefighters. I loved watching him read the bible, from cover to cover. **He, more than anyone I've known, seemed to understand the true spirit of Jesus.**

We used to dance together to music of the 1950's, and he'd make me get up off my aging feet and jig with him. He'd wake me in the morning and record me drinking my first cup of coffee of the day: "OOooooo, that's good coffee" I'd say. And then he'd text it to our large family and they'd all laugh at me.

Scott lived, loved and played music in Boston, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, Austin, New Orleans and Memphis. He played drums in many bands, spanning all musical styles, always seeking musical authenticity. He was the drummer for Rated X, Scotland Barr and the Slow Drags, Flea Circus, Aunt Beanie's First Prize Beets, and many others. He also co-starred in the underground cult film *I Was a Teenage Serial Killer*, and he wrote dozens upon dozens of songs and poems exploring existential angst, unrequited love and, ultimately, his relationship with his own mental health. A friend noted that Scott was "a musician's musician. He was the real thing."

Scott was always surrounded by music and misfits, by found family and vinyl records and bad coffee and his American Spirit cigarettes. He burned bright. He always gave more than he had, preferring to spend most of his meager monthly Social Security disability checks on socks and sleeping bags and gloves for the homeless. His last request when he left Memphis in June 2025 — barely able to walk, suffering from debilitating anxiety — was for his sister to buy packages of clean socks to distribute at the local homeless shelter, which she promptly did.

I also cared for Scott. Scott suffered from bipolar disorder and PTSD. He needed my assistance often in negotiating the complexities of our modern, highly impersonal world that generally has little time for those living with mental health challenges. He was someone who never fully fit into this world, but never stopped trying to soften it anyway. Scott knew suffering, his own and others, and he carried it with the strange grace of someone who saw the cracks in everything and still believed there might be light.

In 2024, Scott wrote and composed “Still Waters,” expressing his resolve to never return to the Lakeside Psychiatric Hospital where he reported being physically and sexually abused after reaching out for mental health help:

“I’d rather stay home

than go to the lakeside

I prefer oceans and rivers instead

The still waters remind me of

unfulfilled potential

unlike

the running and vastness of my dreams.”

I need to tell you: the circumstances of Scott’s death were not inevitable. They were a failure of those to whom he reached out for help to follow the policies meant to safeguard those suffering a

mental health crisis. It was a failure of the Vermont State Police to follow their own directives that were developed over 10 years. It was a failure of the medical establishment to take the time to listen to patients who are suffering mental health pain. And it was a failure of our collective lack of will to protect our most vulnerable community members from neglect and outright abuse in an absolutely and completely failed national mental health system.

That day, July 7, Scott needed a medication adjustment. Instead, he got bullets, sitting in his own living room, surrounded by the police he always feared would one day kill him. We always thought he was paranoid, but it turns out he was right all along.

Scott and I were so excited to move back home. My daughter Kara was Scott's best friend. I like to call them "the bookends." Kara worked so hard to get us into a good home in Putney, where she was only 2 miles away and could help Scott take care of me. Where she could take walks with her brother, and visit thrift stores together. Where we could spend holidays and Christmases together again.

My doctors and counselors say I am in grief. I wake up each morning and not wanting to go on, wondering why I still have to

be alive. I don't sleep. The only way I can be here today is because I am on meds. I feel like an empty shell of a human being. I am depressed. I am angry at the inexperienced State Trooper who shot him, and even more angry at the commander who told him to go in with nothing but a loaded gun after 4 hours of sitting outside our home. I am without joy. Really, if I am honest, I just want to die.

Though Scott's family is wrecked by grief, we will not let Scott be reduced to the worst day of his life. Like all of those suffering from mental health challenges, **he was infinitely more than his diagnosis. Scott was a whole person whose life and spirit will be honored.**

As Scott himself would end every one of the thousands of postcards, letters, and thoughtful gifts he sent to friends and family all over the country:

"Be Well.

Dream Harder.

I love you."

I love you, son, to the moon and back and then some. I look forward to joining you in heaven soon.