



# Mental Health Advocates Launch Campaign to Stop Forced Electroshock

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"Forced shock is torture," says executive director of MindFreedom International

MINNEAPOLIS, MN (April 5, 2021)—MindFreedom International—a multi-affiliate human rights organization of people with psychiatric diagnoses, which has consultative status with the United Nations and helped craft the [UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)—has launched a campaign to prevent the continued use of forced electroshock (also known as electroconvulsive treatment, or ECT) on a 22-year-old Minneapolis man.

Charles Helmer was discharged on March 22, 2021, from Fairview Riverside Psychiatric Clinic at the University of Minnesota and court-ordered to live in a group home and to report every other week for forced electroshock. This is in spite of his own—and his mother's—efforts to prevent it.

He was force-shocked on March 26 and, unless the advocacy campaign is successful, he will be force-shocked on April 9 and every two weeks afterwards.

"No matter what the circumstances, forced shock is unacceptable. It is torture," says Ron Bassman, Ph.D., executive director of MindFreedom International (MFI). "No one deserves to lose their autonomy under the guise of 'helpful' psychiatric treatment."

Electroshock "damages memory and cognition, and brings no lasting relief," according to a [recent article in Aeon by Dr. John Read](#), a professor of clinical psychology at the University of East London. In addition, autopsies have repeatedly shown that it causes brain damage. In fact, "[t]he

idea that ECT causes brain damage was so obvious to the early proponents that they incorporated it into an explanation for how ECT worked,” Dr. Read writes. The article notes that other studies have shown that “there’s no evidence of any benefits beyond the end of the course of treatments, and no evidence that ECT prevents suicide...Furthermore, some people kill themselves because of the damage done to them by ECT.”

The MindFreedom campaign has resulted in hundreds of letters and emails to Dr. Craig Vine of M Health Fairview Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Minnesota Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Governor Tim Walz, Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar, and the Minnesota Daily and Star Tribune. But there has been no satisfactory response, a MindFreedom representative said.

In a letter to Governor Walz, Dr. Bassman wrote, “Charles has not committed a crime and is not considered to be a danger to himself or others, yet he is court-ordered by the state of Minnesota to receive this barbaric treatment every other week at the taxpayer’s expense.”

Electroshock is rightly controversial. Its risks—permanent amnesia and permanent deficits in cognitive abilities—have been confirmed by one of its most prominent proponents, Dr. Harold Sackeim, whose [2007 study in Neuropsychopharmacology](#) ends on this chilling note: “[T]his study provides the first evidence in a large, prospective sample that adverse cognitive effects can persist for an extended period, and that they characterize routine treatment with ECT in community settings.”

Dr. Bassman compared electroshock to kicking an old cathode ray tube television. “When there was static, a kick to the console might temporarily fix the TV,” he said. “But, too often, the kick resulted in damage that was beyond repair. Substitute electroshock to the brain for a kick to the television. But a TV can be replaced. A brain can’t.

“We hope that the media can shine a spotlight on this human rights abuse,” Dr. Bassman concluded.

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