

I am submitting a second written testimony that was published originally on the Madwomen in the Attic website. I am submitting it to you, Attorney General James, because it chronicles the effects that our local western New York institutions have on the lives of citizens. I would like for what I am about to share to be part of the public record, as with my first testimony, and I am grateful for being able to have this venue to tell people with the ability to make change about Barbara Warren Jones, the woman with whom I shared a room at the Erie County Medical Center during my ten-day institutionalization in 2017.

In 2017, while I was incarcerated against my will in a psychiatric institution in Buffalo, NY for ten days, I shared a room with a woman I will never forget.

She was Barbara to me at the time, although on one occasion, I asked her for her last name and I wrote it down in my composition notebook. Tonight, I looked through the pages of that notebook for her name. I have not been able to bear to look at what I had written during my time in hell with my friend until now. I found what I could handle reading for tonight. Three words:

Barbara Warren Jones.

Barbara, a retired hospital administrator, a colorectal cancer survivor, a proud African American woman, and a devout Christian in her mid-eighties, was on dialysis at the time that I met her. She was brought from a retirement home or some kind of rehabilitation center/home to the worst of all area psychiatric hospitals, and she was admitted and labeled with some form of severe psychiatric illness – probably psychosis. In other words, Barbara was thrown away into a snake pit.

Somehow Barbara went from [receiving high quality medical care in 2015 at Roswell Park](#) to being in psychiatric medical hell two short years later. I met Barbara in the Snake Pit of Buffalo, the Erie County Medical Center (ECMC), and she was my saving grace.

Barbara told me while I was with her that her dialysis medication made her say some crazy-sounding things, and that they sent her to the Erie County Medical Center (ECMC) because of it. My guess, after spending a number of days with Barbara, was that she was experiencing some form of memory loss, or dementia. During my time with her, she showed no signs of being a harm to herself or others. She was gracious, quiet, and cooperative. Why would an elderly woman in her eighties, with possible memory issues, be dragged into a psychiatric ward? What “harm” could she have posed to herself or others? In her eighties and (dis)abled, Barbara could not even get up from her own bed and walk to her wheelchair without assistance. How did she end up under lock and key in a psych ward?

Barbara did not know how long she had been in the mental hospital and she did not know how long she would be in there; she had lost all sense of time, as many people deprived of daylight in carceral psychiatric institutions do.

Barbara never should have been brought to or admitted into a psychiatric institution, let alone a prison complex that calls itself a psychiatric care institution. She never should have been diagnosed with a form of psychosis (almost all admitted psych patients at this institution are: it’s

the hub diagnosis for acute versions of various other severe psychiatric diagnoses). Whatever unusual thoughts or behaviors Barbara might have been expressing should have been addressed in another way, in any other way: and in a humane way. Entry into a psychiatric emergency institution should be a last resort, not a first resort. Entry into this particular emergency psychiatric institution is in no one's best interest; if you are a person with any conscience whatsoever, you would not wish it on your worst enemy— let alone enact it on a precious person like Barbara Warren-Jones. Barbara is one of the sweetest and most gentle elderly women I have ever known, and now that I am free to say and do something about what I witnessed poor Barbara experience, I am going to blow my whistle for Barbara.

I cannot say much more, now, about the experience with Barbara, but I will say this:

If anyone ever had grounds for a false imprisonment and malpractice lawsuit, it is Barbara Warren-Jones.

Will she ever receive justice for her (mis)treatment? I doubt it. At least not the kind that comes through the court system.

But Barbara, who was admitted wrongly, misdiagnosed egregiously, medicated improperly, and who suffered disgusting neglect, deserves justice.

When I moved into Barbara's room, the first thing I noticed was the stench. This was not Barbara's fault; this was the fault of the hospital, which does not maintain minimal hygiene standards for its psychiatric patients— ironic, given that it uses mental "hygiene" legislation to legally justify incarcerating human beings for the purpose of generating profit from insurance companies.

I was distressed to have to move into a room in which feces was smeared across the toilet and bathroom, but what could I do? It was outrageous that this was the condition in the first place, and everything was dried up and hard to wipe off, which suggests that it had been there for some time. I could not show this to anyone (not even my family members, though I did try) and I could not take photos of it because the psychiatric unit keeps out anyone other than its patients and its staff from patient rooms and because psychiatric patients are not treated like human beings so technological devices are not allowed in the ward (staff, however, can use technology in the nurses station, and they do – this is how dehumanizing and imbalanced power structures work).

There is a reason why psychiatric medical centers do not want cameras in or eyes on their psychiatric units. The legal justification is that they are protecting patient rights to privacy. Hippa. What a sick joke. The institution does not want the public seeing what happens inside. They do not want anyone knowing that they keep women like Barbara Warren-Jones locked up like chattel for up to 90 days.

Monsters live in the dark, and their victims do, too.

But the light of the human spirit shines through darkness, nevertheless. Enter Barbara, who still had faith in a higher power, while being enslaved and abused.

I was Barbara's witness. I witnessed what was done to Barbara Warren-Jones. I shared a room with her. I saw how they let her be covered in and surrounded by her own filth. I gave her a sponge bath: something nurses in the deplorable facility should have been doing but neglected to do. I treated her with the care and compassion that the institution denied her, and I was supposedly a patient.

I was her witness and I am her witness, and I will testify until the day I die that what happened to Barbara Warren-Jones in a state psychiatric hospital is nothing short of horror and institutional abuse.

When I met Barbara, I immediately thought of my great grandmother, whom I was close with until she died at almost-97 years old. I thought of my Grandma Walsh being locked up like this, being treated this way, and I was devastated. Given that I was a victim too at the time, I could not be outraged. I could not allow any kind of intense emotion come into my body out of sheer terror. I was plagued by terror that anything I felt or expressed would be pathologized. Any expression of emotion on my part would have been recorded by the nurses who walked the halls, monitoring our every move and utterance. So my goal, having been forced to surrender to this degrading experience, was to show little emotion. It was not hard because I felt as though my soul had been ripped out of me.

But Barbara still had her soul, somehow, and being with her gave me my only glimmer of hope: that maybe I still, somehow, had mine.

There was Barbara, and the reminder of Grandma Walsh. What would I do if Grandma Walsh was with me in here? That was all I needed to ask myself. I would help her. I would take care of her. I knew I had a moral responsibility, despite my own victimization, to help a fellow victim.

So please, ask yourself:

Would you be okay with your sweet, helpless eighty-something year old grandmother –who was perhaps losing her marbles but who was largely immobile– being thrown into a bug-infested sterile, filthy psychiatric ward, fed cardboard-like meals everyday, left in her own filth, mistreated and neglected? Would you?

Dogs in animal shelters are kept in better conditions than the ones Barbara Warren-Jones was made to endure.

Of course you would not want your grandmother– or anyone else for that matter– being subjected to this “treatment.” No one should be mistreated this way.

Certainly not dear Barbara Warren-Jones, my roommate, my saving grace, my friend.

I was never able to get in touch or to meet again with Barbara Warren Jones after my stay at ECMC, but my sincerest prayer is that she was able to leave the hospital and to go somewhere safe and warm where she would be cared for and loved. I have never been able to connect with anyone directly from her life, except for one friend of hers. I know she had one good, kind friend

who visited her at ECMC and brought her a paper to read every week or two, and I believe and take heart in knowing that this friend was with her until the end. Though I cannot locate an obituary for dear Barbara, through a social media post by her friend, I was deeply sorry to learn of her passing, in 2021. Her life matters, and I will continue to pay tribute to her spirit in my life and life's work.

Rest in Peace and Power, Barbara Warren Jones.