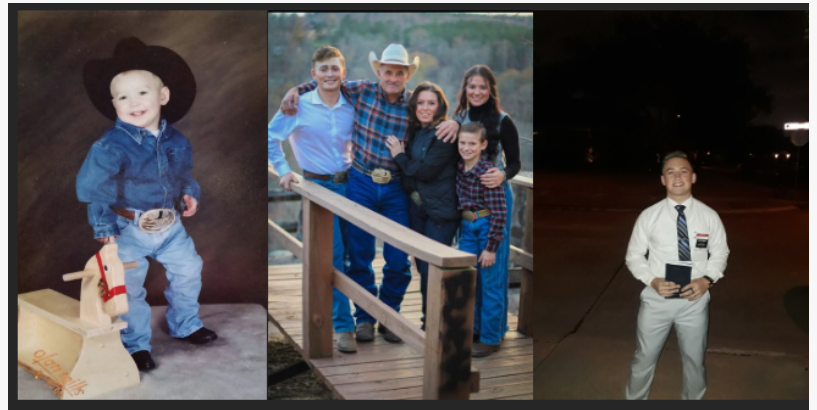


National Shattering Silence Coalition Calls for Urgent Reform After Preventable Psychiatric System Failure in Alabama

A mother's desperate multi-county chase ends in tragedy despite a psychiatric bed being secured and waiting.

BOSTON, MA, UNITED STATES, April 21, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The National Shattering Silence Coalition (NSSC) and Shattering Silence Coalition Alabama (SSCAL), led by State Director Holly Strayer and NSSC member Tindra Hammett, today issued a formal call for sweeping systemic reform following a preventable psychiatric tragedy now catalyzing legislative action in Alabama.



From L to R, River Hammett as a child, with his family, and as a young adult volunteering as a missionary

The case centers on River Hammett, whose story has exposed critical breakdowns in how psychiatric emergencies are identified, communicated, and acted upon across jurisdictions. In response, advocates are advancing the "River Act" initiative — a proposed statewide system designed to ensure immediate, coordinated intervention when a psychiatric crisis is clinically identified. Two Alabama legislators have already signaled support following a public forum that brought national attention to the case.

“

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*Ann Corcoran, RN, MSN,
Executive Director of NSSC*

The Case for Complicity: A Bed Waiting, a System Paralyzed

On the morning of the tragedy, River Hammett was in

active psychosis and had been clinically identified by his psychiatric provider as a "psychiatric emergency" in need of involuntary commitment. The provider miraculously secured a psychiatric bed and prepared for admission.

Despite the available bed and a doctor sounding the alarm, intervention did not occur. A responding mental health officer determined River did not meet the legal threshold of "imminent danger," overriding the clinical assessment of a licensed psychiatrist, and he was left untreated and not detained.

The Fragmented Jurisdictional "Ping-Pong"

What followed was a breakdown not of resources, but of coordination. Left to navigate a fragmented system alone, Tindra Hammet was forced into a time-sensitive, cross county effort to initiate emergency legal intervention. She spent the following hours in a desperate "jurisdictional chase" across county lines.

One county denied her emergency petition because River was not physically present within their borders at that moment. She was met with more bureaucratic hurdles in the next county. While she navigated the system alone, effectively servicing as her own dispatcher and legal advocate, the window for intervention closed.

Hours later, while the paperwork sat unfinished, a life was lost.

"This is not a resource issue—it is a systems design failure," said Ann Corcoran, RN, MSN, Executive Director of NSSC. "When a doctor identifies a psychiatric emergency and a bed is available, but the law still prevents action because of a county line, the outcome is structural. The system prioritized 'legal geography' over the life of a human being in a medical crisis."

From Missed Treatment to Prolonged Incarceration

Today, 22 months later, River remains in a jail cell without medication, where he continues to severely decompensate and experience psychosis while awaiting a forensic bed—a wait that in Alabama can currently last five to seven years.

"The hardest part was already done—we had a bed. The doctors were ready. The hospital was ready," said Tindra Hammett. "But because the system sent me in circles across county lines instead of acting on a doctor's warning, that bed sat empty while a tragedy occurred. Now, River is languishing in a jail cell without medication, and I am told he must wait years for a bed that should have been his two years ago."

The River Act: An Alabama Solution

NSSC and SSCAL are advocating for the River Act to ensure that medical necessity precedes tragedy. The legislation addresses the following pillars:

- The River Alert: A front-end emergency coordination mechanism allowing Alabama to respond to psychiatric emergencies with the same urgency as an AMBER Alert.

□□Statewide Validity & Cross-County Execution: Removing fragmented county-based authority by ensuring an emergency mental health detainer issued in one county is recognized and actionable anywhere in Alabama.

□□Clinical Accountability: Requiring written documentation and supervisory review when a law enforcement or mental health officer overrides a treating clinician's clinical certification of a psychiatric emergency.

□□Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) & Clinical Continuity: Mandating a statewide framework for Assisted Outpatient Treatment, ensuring that court-ordered community care is governed by clinical necessity rather than arbitrary legal expiration dates. This reform eliminates the "stopping points" that currently force families into a cycle of endless, repetitive probate filings to maintain their loved ones' stability.

□□Specialized Training: Mandating crisis-response training for first responders and jail staff specifically focused on recognizing "Anosognosia" and the medical nuances of psychosis.

A National Crisis of Neglect

While the River Act is a specific initiative for Alabama, Corcoran notes that the underlying failures are part of a national epidemic.

"What happened to River is the ultimate proof that 'imminent danger' is a failed public safety standard," said Corcoran. "Can you imagine taking a loved one having a stroke to an emergency room, only to be told they aren't eligible for care because you're in the 'wrong county'? We would never tolerate that for any other organ in the body, yet we accept it for the brain. Across the country, the laws prioritize the 'Right to be Sick' until it is too late. This is a preventable failure of medical accountability."

The Human Cost

"I have had to accept a truth that no mother ever wants to face: I cannot 'fix' my son," said Hammett. "I have spent years trying to love him back to health, but you cannot 'love' a biological break in the brain any more than you can love a broken bone back together. I am his mother, but I cannot be his doctor, his judge, and his jailer. I am tired of the system expecting mothers to perform miracles while the state refuses to provide basic medical accountability."

"The system walked away from the treatment that was waiting for River that morning," added Holly Strayer, NSSC Alabama State Director. "We must move past the excuses of county lines and jurisdictional hurdles. Treatment prevents tragedy. No more excuses. Alabama must fix this system before another mother is forced to make these same calls and receive the same devastating news."

About NSSC:

An alliance of survivors, families, and clinicians representing the 22 million affected by Severe Mental Illness (SMI), NSSC drives systemic reform to ensure a National Standard of Care that

replaces neglect with medical accountability and the "Right to be Well."

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