

Report on Austin City Council Public Health and Human Services
Subcommittee Hearing on Psychiatric Electroshock in Austin
(April 4, 2007)

The Coalition for the Abolition of Electroshock in Texas (CAEST) made a presentation to the Austin City Council on electroshock in Austin. Presenting were CAEST members John Breeding, PHD, Moira Dolan, MD, executive director of the Medical Accountability Network, and Lee Spiller, executive director of the Citizens Commission on Human Rights.

Breeding gave the subcommittee members (Lee Leffingwell, Mike Martinez; Betty Dunkerley was absent) a brief rundown on the history of electroshock, and its lack of safety and efficacy. He explained that he was an abolitionist, just like the first reaction of the creator of modern day ECT, Ugo Cerletti, who after witnessing his first effort on a human being, wrote, “When I saw the patient’s reaction, I thought to myself: This ought to be abolished.” (<http://www.endofshock.com/pig.htm>). And just like the first reaction of another witness of that ignominious event, Lothar Kalinowsky, who emigrated to the United States and became one of the foremost shock doctors in this country. Kalinowsky said in an interview According to my wife — because I don’t remember it exactly — she claims that when I came home I was very pale and said, “I saw something terrible today — I never want to see that again!” For a video by CAEST medical adviser John Friedberg, which shows Kalinowsky saying this, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBK5Y5rmAy0>.

Breeding gave the Council some statistics on electroshock and told them about Seton Shoal Creek and St. David’s Hospitals in Austin. He also told them that the Council that the Public Health and Human Services subcommittee was ideal for confronting electroshock in Austin, emphasizing that electroshock is a public health and safety issue, and a human rights issue. He told the Council about actions taken by the cities of San Francisco (a moratorium for several years beginning in 1972 and a resolution statement after two days of public hearings in 1992), and Berkeley (a complete ban by their Board of Supervisors in 1982 after a citywide referendum, which lasted 40 days before the courts stepped in). Breeding also presented the council with a petition signed by many people, with two specific requests:

**A Petition to the Austin City Council:
Calling for Action Toward Informing and Protecting the Citizens of Austin
from Psychiatric Electroshock**

We, the undersigned, consider psychiatric electroshock to be a cruel, harmful, and unnecessary procedure.

We welcome the Austin City Council's current inquiry into the practice of psychiatric electroshock in Austin.

We ask that the Council take all actions within its power to help put an end to this practice, initially by:

- 1) Passing a *City Ordinance* declaring any facility or individual who practices psychiatric electroshock to be ineligible for any contractual or other referral or funding arrangement with the City of Austin.

- 2) Passing a *Resolution Statement* describing the procedure of psychiatric electroshock, outlining the safety and efficacy information on electroshock, recommending a moratorium on the use of electroshock in Austin, encouraging city hospitals to develop medical wellness programs in lieu of electroshock, and generally encouraging social and psychological methods of support and assistance for the citizens of Austin in lieu of electroshock.

Dr. Dolan confirmed the truth about the dangers and lack of effectiveness of electroshock, and described the insurmountable problems of ever achieving authentic informed consent for electroshock. Her emphasis was on electroshock as a human rights issue.

Lee Spiller let the councilmembers know that the two requests in our petition were very much within their purview. He also told them that what we really want and need is for our local hospitals to offer medical wellness programs that can really make a difference in people's lives.

The CAEST formal presentation ended with a 3-minute video featuring musician/shock survivor Don Erickson at our 11-1-06 protest at Seton Shoal Creek Hospital. This powerful piece made it real to the Council that we are present and active in the community. See the full video of the hearing to view this piece.

Most powerful and moving, of course, was the testimony of the courageous group of electroshock survivors who testified. Evelyn Scogin used American sign language with the first part of her testimony, explaining that she had been a long-time teacher at the Texas school for the Deaf, but that since receiving at least 31 electroshocks at Seton Shoal Creek, she had forgotten all of the language, and was now unable to work.

Sumner Erickson told the Council about the alliance between CAEST and the Roky Erickson Trust, and about the 3-15-07 event, The 5th annual Roky Erickson Ice Cream Social celebrating Electroshock Survivors (<http://www.endofshock.com/ice%20cream%20social.htm>). Sumner also spoke on behalf of his brother, Roky, who is an electroshock survivor.

Don Erickson told the Council directly about his experience of 10 electroshocks at Seton Shoal Creek, and the utter failure and harm of the "treatment." He addressed some of the hard reality of the dynamics that biopsychiatry and electroshock avoid—the feelings of despair and desperation—and the utter betrayal that goes with trusting the doctors and allowing oneself to be electroshocked.

Dottie Curry, a lifelong Austinite was beautifully eloquent as she described some of the human rights progress she had witnessed as Black woman. She told the Council that, just as her children could use a library today while she could not as a child, she hoped that her grandchildren would never be subjected to electroshock as she was. She said that, of all the hurts she had suffered over her 70 years, electroshock was absolutely the worst. She said she did learn one thing from it—be careful who to talk to about her "radical" ideas.

Artist Jim Franklin told about being electroshocked during his days of exploring expanded consciousness with psychedelic drugs and about his mother later being shocked by same Texas small town psychiatrist, who later underwent psychiatric treatment himself. As an artist, Franklin

places great value on freedom to be creative and experiment with life outside the definitions of the enforcers of “normality.”

Breeding left the council members with a folder full of important data on electroshock and on the dialogue with the Seton Board. Councilmembers Leffingwell and Martinez said they would study the matter, discuss it with colleagues and relevant city consultants, and bring the issue up again at the next meeting on 5-15-05.

See the video of this Austin City Council meeting, created by videographer Mary Luker, on our website at [COMING VERY SOON.]