



NEWS

TREATMENT ADVOCACY CENTER

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TEN YEARS AFTER MURDERS:

Law Meant to Prevent Tragedies Remains Overlooked and Unused

ARLINGTON, VA - Ten years after the January 10 morning when college student Laura Wilcox, 19, was gunned down in a county mental health department where she was volunteering, the preventative law that her death inspired goes overlooked and unused in 56 of California's 58 counties.

"Laws like this one have been shown to spare lives and reduce taxpayer costs elsewhere," said James Pavle, executive director of the [Treatment Advocacy Center](http://TreatmentAdvocacyCenter.org), a national nonprofit dedicated to eliminating barriers to treatment for severe mental illness. "In this era of limited resources and continuing senseless tragedies, it is inexcusable that all but two California counties have failed to opt into this compassionate, common-sense approach."

[Laura's Law](#) authorizes court-ordered outpatient treatment for people with untreated severe mental illness if they meet strict legal criteria. The law was passed by the California Legislature in 2002, a year after Scott H. Thorpe - a recluse with a history of untreated mental health problems - went on the shooting rampage that left Wilcox, Pearlie Mae Feldman, 68, and Mike Markle, 24, dead. Two other victims were wounded in the attacks.

To date, Los Angeles County has opted into a small pilot program of [assisted outpatient treatment](#) (AOT). In Nevada County, where the killings took place, the law has been fully implemented and proven so successful that the county was honored in 2010 by the California State Association of Counties. In announcing the recognition, CSAC said Nevada County offset public costs of \$80,000 with savings estimated at \$203,000 that otherwise would have been spent on hospitalization and incarceration of program participants.

"California passed Laura's Law to help make sure the same thing doesn't happen to another family," said Nick Wilcox, Laura's father. "Each year that goes by without California counties implementing the law is another year when tragedies that could have been prevented can – and, sadly, will – occur." Moreover, Wilcox said, implementing the law would "make it possible for people who are severely ill to get the mental health care they so desperately need."

Pavle of the Treatment Advocacy Center said preventable tragedies such as the Nevada County killings could be reduced in California if more counties implemented Laura's Law or if the California legislature mandated implementation statewide.

Thorpe remains in a state mental hospital where he was committed after being found not guilty by reason of insanity.