

But, gradually, he ran out of other options. Local motels refused to rent to him, his sisters say.

Karen Newton, an office assistant with Solano County, first met Rippee in front of the county building where she worked—he was sleeping on a strip of cardboard. She bought him taquitos and chocolate milk and clean clothes. Newton, whose own son has schizophrenia and is currently in Napa State Hospital, was disturbed by the frequent assaults she saw against Rippee, including a bad beating that left him swollen.

“The things I’ve seen in the last year have been horrifying,” she said.

In the past 15 years, Vacaville police say they have arrested Rippee 25 times, charging him with unlawful camping and public intoxication.

Sgt. Aaron Dahl, who supervises the community response unit for the Vacaville Police Department, says he wants people like Rippee to stay inside, take medications and get help, but “that’s not the reality of how things work.”

“I wish I had a magic wand that could go help everybody,” he said. “And it’s very hard, because there’s not an easy answer for everybody. There’s just not.”

In early 2018, Privatte said her daughter saw members of a Solano County community Facebook site criticizing their family for abandoning Rippee. The twins intensified their efforts to help their brother.

“The law has stopped Mark from getting treatment,” Privatte said. “The law. Not us.”

## State law revisited

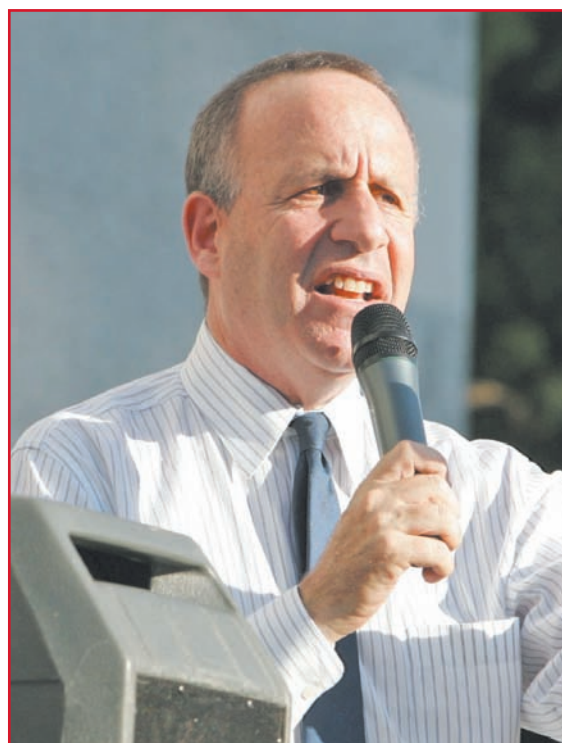
On April 24, 2018, Privatte told the Solano County Board of Supervisors that her brother had attempted suicide more than 20 times, and that other people beat and robbed him regularly.

“It’s not because I want to lock my brother up and be done with him,” she said, crying. “It’s because I want him to be safe.”

“What can we do to help?” asked Supervisor Skip

**Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg was among dozens of leaders who met last fall to discuss involuntary mental health treatment.**

PHOTO BY KELLY HUSTON VIA FLICKR



Thomson. “Because what we’re doing is unacceptable.”

Privatte showed up repeatedly to beg the board for help. This spring, she received an email from Thomson’s office on behalf of the county, explaining that her brother could not be conserved in part because each time he was placed on an involuntary hold, he stabilized to the point that he legally had to be released: “This is not a situation that we have ignored nor that we condone,” the letter said. “Simply the law requires stringent standards to impose conservatorships—standards that so far we cannot meet.”

Huber, the director of Health and Social Services, said that “many, many, many different agencies” have interacted with Rippee over the years, and the county has made—and continues to make—efforts to provide treatment.

“I’ve struggled with this for the five years I’ve been here,” he said. “The street is not an appropriate place for him to live.”

The county this year implemented Laura’s Law, a 2002 state law that allows for court-ordered outpatient treatment. A few weeks ago, Rippee’s mother applied for it on her son’s behalf. But the program doesn’t serve someone with a traumatic brain injury, Huber said.

On Sept. 27, someone posted a picture of Rippee on the Facebook group. His head looked swollen; his sisters recognized symptoms of a brain abscess.

Privatte convinced her brother to go with her to the hospital, where he had surgery the next morning. After two weeks, the hospital transferred him to a Suisun City board-and-care. In late October, he returned to the streets.

That same week, dozens of mental health leaders from around the state gathered in Sacramento to talk about the future of the Lanterman-Petris-Short Act. They discussed how counties lack the resources to build out a continuum of care.

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg asked his colleagues if the debate around involuntary treatment might be reframed to insist that people have both a right—and an obligation—to come indoors. That would mean that, before the state could compel people to come indoors, they would have to have safe, appropriate placements to offer them.

“Our North Star needs to be to end this horrific situation,” he said.

A few weeks later, I found Rippee at a Vallejo strip mall, asleep on a patch of concrete littered with dirty socks and desiccated orange peels. His head rested on a blue IKEA bag, which held a pale green fleece blanket studded with burrs.

After Rippee woke up, he requested a coffee the way he likes it—a lot of sugar, a little coffee. He was friendly and talkative, his facts smoothly interwoven with delusions. He talked about the beauty of classical music. He recalled delivering pies for his parents’ business. Then he toggled to concerns about the KKK chasing him: “I’m trying to stay ahead of those guys,” he said.

Ultimately, Rippee said, he wants a home with a shower and someone to care for him. He doesn’t want to be in a locked facility, but he does wish he could live inside.

“At night it gets cold,” he said. “I just sit there and shake.

“To leave a blind man outside, you know, I just figured the county could do better than that,” he continued. “They’re not supposed to leave me outside. The United States of America is nice enough. They’re not supposed to let this happen.” □


# SUPPORT REAL NEWS

**DONATE TO N&R'S  
INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM FUND:  
INDEPENDENTJOURNALISMFUND.ORG**

## PAGEANT THEATER

JANUARY 10 - 16

### A HIDDEN LIFE



FRI - SAT: 2:45pm and 6:30pm / SUN: Noon and 3:45pm  
MON - WED: 6:30pm / THU: 2:45pm and 6:30pm

MOVE Benefit Screening SUN: 7:15pm

## LET THE FIRE BURN

530-343-0663 [pageantchico.com](http://pageantchico.com)



**Serenity  
CBD**



## 5x Award Winning CBD

- Pain & Stress Relief
- All Organic Ingredients
- Made Locally in Chico
- 3x Lab Tested

Find us online  
at [SerenityCBD.com](http://SerenityCBD.com)  
or at your favorite  
local stores!


NEW EARTH  
MARKET

Organic  
PRODUCE  
& NATURAL FOODS  
CHICO, CA

CO  
OP


Anika Burke

# LET'S PLANT!



## BLOOMING CYCLAMEN

Cyclamen naturally bloom in the fall & winter & thrive indoors or out. Swept back petals resemble shooting stars & their heart shaped leaves are embroidered with intricate silver patterns. A great addition to your winter garden.



**MON- FRI 8AM-4PM  
SATURDAY 8:30AM-5PM  
2270 FAIR STREET | 343-7615**