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Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 317 and Senate Bill 541. I think that these bills will work to reduce emergency department crowding and to increase access to care and quality of care for patients in need of involuntary mental health hospitalization in Maryland. Delays in the ability to admit patients to a psychiatric bed on an involuntary basis in Maryland result in poor care for the psychiatric patient in question and have a ripple effect on all patients seeking emergency care due to an increase in emergency department crowding.

House Bill 317 and Senate Bill 541 will also allow psychiatric nurse practitioners, in addition to psychiatrists, to provide testimony at involuntary court hearings about the patients they have cared for. This will ensure that pertinent details are not missed and will reduce the chance that an unstable psychiatric patient might be released into the community prematurely. Currently, a psychiatrist is required for this testimony, and in many cases the psychiatric nurse practitioner is the specialty provider who has been caring for the patient in question, not the psychiatrist. Allowing psychiatric nurse practitioners to testify at these hearings will allow the provider who knows the patient the best to be the one giving the testimony.

In summary, I hope you will vote "yes" to pass House Bill 317 and Senate Bill 541 to increase access to care and to improve the quality of care for psychiatric patients in our State.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Huffner".

William E. Huffner, MD, MBA, FACEP, FACHE
Chief Medical Officer
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