

TESTIMONY IN **SUPPORT** OF CONSUMER HEALTH ACCESS PROGRAM FOR MENTAL
HEALTH AND ADDICTION CARE – ESTABLISHMENT (HB0517)

Submitted by Laura Mitchell, Montgomery County Resident, Consumer of and Advocate for Mental
Health & Substance Use Disorder Prevention and Treatment
to the Maryland House Health and Government Operations Committee

February 21, 2022

Mr. Chairman and Respected Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee;

I urge you to support Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care – Establishment (HB0517) that will establish a “one stop shop” to assist consumers in accessing the care they need covered the insurance benefits they pay for, and help consumers navigate the appeals and complaints process when barriers to that access arise.

I have spent the last 30 years navigating the tumultuous pathways to mental health and substance use disorder treatment for my son, and now for mental health care for my granddaughter. Not much has changed. As I have made literally hundreds of calls and sent at least a gross of emails trying to find her care since her December 3, 2021, discharge from inpatient care for suicidal ideation, we still have no PHP, IOP, psychologist, or psychiatrist to treat her.

I spend 20+ hours weekly, searching for care that we can access within a reasonable time and distance, and can actually afford, a combination that does not seem to exist. Every minute I spend seeking the urgent care she needs, is time I cannot spend caring for her. This is also extremely stressful to me and the rest of our family. As I watch her backslide every day, I become more desperate to find that trifecta of care for her to save her and see her prosper again.

I worry constantly that she will be like so many of my friends’ children who have fallen victim to their disease while awaiting mental health or substance use disorder care. If we had HB0517 in effect right now, I have no doubt that I would have a partner to help find the care to treat her conditions.

What’s more, the consumer health access program will be able to identify and quantify the instances of the types of barriers that our family and thousands like us have experienced for decades. Identifying those obstacles will allow regulators and legislators to bring meaningful and appropriate changes to the process so that not one more life is lost while searching for care or awaiting a space in treatment.

I support HB0517 because it will aid consumers in accessing the care we pay insurance premiums to ensure and that will, undoubtedly, save lives.

For all the reasons cited above, I urge you to **support HB0517**.

Respectfully Submitted,
Laura Mitchell

Mother, Grandmother, Wife and Advocate