

Valerie Ferrell, Cecil County

I'm writing in favor of SB444 which would reduce barriers to care for psychiatric and mental illness in Maryland. This is a critical issue.

I was caregiver for my sister for over five years in my home. Her behavior became increasingly violent toward me and my family as I struggled to get her care. She was recommended for residential psychiatric housing, but none was available. She was on a wait list for over a year, which means I had to reapply for her, which is a ridiculous situation to be in when you desperately need help for a family member. Unfortunately, the "housing" she ended up in was the local detention center for *nine* months for a misdemeanor, after she came at me with a knife. It was the exact outcome I could foresee given her increasing aggression toward me, and that I tried so hard to avoid by looking for services that just don't exist in Maryland. The state, the public defender, myself, and each judge all understood and agreed she needed psychiatric housing, and we were all aware she would be on the streets if she wasn't in the detention center.

We have a dangerous crisis in Maryland when it comes to protecting families and individuals, and providing services for mental illness. Maryland has about 2,000 beds to my knowledge, and when you add together the year she waited before her time in jail, it took TWO years for her to get a placement and the inevitable escalation to physical, criminal violence that could have been avoided with proper resources in this state. It was ultimately the persistence from a social worker in the public defender's office that helped find her placement.

I urge you to do everything you can to alleviate this situation for all Marylanders by allowing facilities to more easily increase bed capacity.