

# David Pickar, MD

Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry  
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

4915 Dorset Avenue

Phone 301.263.1313 FAX 301.263.1315

Chevy Chase, MD 20815

drp@davidpickar.com www.davidpickar.com

Maryland Medical License D0039290

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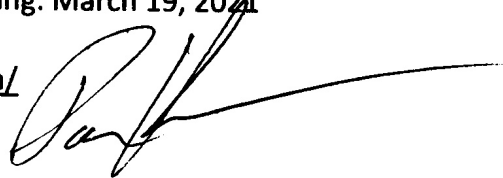
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March 17, 2021

Testimony for HB1344

Health and Government Operations Committee. Hearing: March 19, 2021

From: David Pickar, MD <http://www.davidpickar.com/>  
4915 Dorset Avenue  
Chevy Chase, MD 20815



Position: SUPPORT

I enthusiastically endorse House Bill 1344 and support it without reservation. The measures of this bill provide for a more medically appropriate standard for the involuntary hospital commitment of individuals with a serious mental disorder. Bill 1344 provides excellent guidance for intervening in the conditions that lead to danger to self or others.

As a psychiatrist I have spent a great deal of my more-than-40 years as a physician studying serious mental disorders both as a Branch Chief at The National Institute of Mental Health and as a doctor directly providing care for these patients. I have seen up close how a psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia, particularly when not treated, reduces the ability to discern real from the unreal, and extends to the patient's denial of illness that in turn can lead to life-threatening realities. I encounter the limitation of the current law on a regular basis and know how it undermines my ability to offer the best treatment for my patients. Families of patients with serious mental illness unfortunately know this through painful, exhaustive and sometimes tragic experiences.

Maryland lags behind the majority of states with regard to its laws for involuntary hospitalization as well as with its laws regarding treatment after one is involuntarily hospitalized. Preservation of civil liberties and individual rights are critical in Democracy, but when this preservation is used as justification to hamper or prevent meaningful treatment of the seriously mentally ill, the line of preserving civil liberties is blurred. Ask a parent of a mentally ill son or daughter what that child's civil liberties really are when they are psychotic and detached from reality. Ask the parents about Civil Liberties while they are praying that the police will arrest their son or daughter and get them to a hospital for treatment just to keep him or her safe. Ask the parents about Civil Liberties when the doctors in the hospital cannot convince the paranoid son or daughter to take meds against their will, only to have their child released to a tragic ending. It happens ... too often.

I am proud to serve as a Maryland licensed physician but not proud of the state's record for the seriously mentally ill.