

**Testimony for HB1344 Mental Hygiene – Reform of Laws and delivery of Services**

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: March 19, 2021

**From:** Mary and Carl Custer, Montgomery County

**Position:** SUPPORT

My name is Mary Custer and my husband and I live in Bethesda, MD in Montgomery County. Our 37 year old grandson was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at age 18 in 2002. We want to share his story and ask for your support for legislation to clarify the dangerousness standard for emergency petition and involuntary hospital admission. This legislation would enable police, doctors, and family members to seek needed help for those who are reasonably expected to be unable to provide for their basic needs, and not just when they present an active danger such as threats of suicide or violence.

Our grandson was caught in the revolving door of psychosis, arrests, and hospital admissions from 2002 to 2007. There were a total of five hospital admissions and six arrests in Montgomery County. One of the biggest impediments to obtaining timely in-patient care for our grandson was Maryland's dangerousness standards and their interpretation. Each hospital stay occurred only after significant deterioration in his mental health and significant efforts on the part of the entire extended family.

This revolving door finally came to an end in 2007, when our grandson was found by the New Jersey Highway Patrol on the shoulder of I-95 with no money, no credit cards, and no gas. They informed us that he had not done anything illegal but appeared to be manic and in danger. I confirmed that he had a history of mental illness and hospitalizations. They said they would keep an eye on him. Within a few hours we received a second call. He had been arrested in Phillipsburg, NJ and taken to the jail in Warren County. We found this level of contact unique.

The following incarceration was also unique. The judge set a high bail to deter premature release, and the facility asked us to contact his psychiatrist to provide them with prescription information. We arranged for release after 30 days, when he was sufficiently stabilized to continue treatment in the community. The revolving door finally stopped.

New Jersey's dangerousness standard was definitely instrumental in this positive outcome for our grandson. There have been no arrests and no hospitalizations since "New Jersey." For the past 14 years, our grandson has held a full-time job and been a contributing citizen of Montgomery County. When he needed help, clear state standards came to his aid, kept him safe and most of all, kept him alive.

Clarifying Maryland's current law would remove barriers to treatment and contribute to positive outcomes for many Maryland citizens suffering from severe mental illness. This legislation would enable police, doctors, and family members to seek more timely help for those who are reasonably expected to be unable to provide for their basic needs, and not just when they present an active danger such as threats of suicide or violence.