

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

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: March 19, 2021

From: Carmen Diaz, Montgomery County

Position: SUPPORT

I am a close relative of a young woman suffering from a long history of schizoaffective and bipolar disorder. She has been a victim of the danger standard for involuntary psychiatric evaluation, which acted as a barrier to receiving the treatment she desperately needed.

My relative was **homeless** for more than 3 years. She was thrown out of several shelters due to misconduct. Although she was suffering from psychosis and unable to care for herself, the mental health professionals at two of the shelters in Montgomery County claimed **she did not meet the danger standard for emergency evaluation because she was not suicidal or homicidal**. In one shelter she was assaulted by another resident.

Although my relative used to participate in voluntary treatment, in her current psychotic state, she was unable to recognize she had an illness and refused all treatment programs. My relative's family has been consumed with anxiety and fear for their loved one for 3 years.

Recently after eviction from a shelter, my relative was out on the streets for a week. Her psychotic delusions escalated and, believing she was "saving" a young child, she tried to abduct the child from a young baby-sitter while they were out walking. Next step, my relative was arrested and **put in jail in Frederick County with a felony charge**.

This unnecessary, traumatic, painful, and costly situation could have been avoided if only the Maryland Danger Standard that requires someone to be "a danger to self or others" were not so vague that professionals can interpret it as requiring imminent suicidal or homicidal behavior.

I strongly believe that the Maryland Danger Standard should be clearly defined by:

1. Including grave disability and psychiatric deterioration standards
2. Making clear that danger need not be imminent
3. Including ability to look at the person's history.

Please support HB1344 which is a more humane, clear, and reasonable Danger Standard that facilitates treatment before tragedy.