

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

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: March 19, 2021

By: Karen A. Mann, RN, BSN Montgomery County

POSITION: SUPPORT

- My name is Karen Mann . I am employed as a hospice intake manager and I have had Bipolar Disorder since I was first diagnosed with a major manic episode with psychotic features. At that time I did not realize that I was ill and needed treatment and my family and doctor did not believe I met the dangerousness standard for involuntary hospitalization. The result was I ended up in jail.
- I disappeared from work thinking I was the star of a movie. I was found the next day after I entered an unlocked home and destroyed property. I clearly believed the police officer that came was my deceased father. The officer knew I belonged in a hospital but told me he had no choice but to take me to the County jail. Clearly. Once in jail, I became more confused, rapidly hallucinating and having delusions to the point of having to be put in solitary confinement for my safety for almost a week. Medications were started and I could soon see the severity of the situation.
- This should never have happened.
- Two days prior to my disappearance I became unable to care for myself. I went to the airport to buy a plane ticket without a way to pay for it, and without any luggage or cash. I had walked away from a full time job and a relationship. At this point my primary care doctor was called and she could not say that I met the dangerousness standard for involuntary hospital admission.
- In my second week in jail my cellmates all had charges for drugs or prostitution. A woman slit her wrists in front of me. A hospital would have been much more therapeutic and much less traumatic.
- Consumers like me live in fear of ever getting that sick again. I know I will be taking medications every day for life, with unpleasant side effects. I also know with Bipolar Disorder there are ups and downs. Now as a spouse, a mother of a 12 year old that we adopted and as a nurse I have a huge responsibility to be vigilant about treatment.
- We have to help the Gravely Disabled with chronic and persistent mental illness to get evaluations and access to hospital treatment when they are not able to make the choice themselves. I was too sick to make that decision. I ended up in the criminal justice system. It followed me for many years. One adoption agency refused to talk to us because of it.
- Our jails are filled with people with mental illness who could be living a productive life if they had received timely treatment. It is time to change the law to clarify that the dangerousness standard for emergency evaluation and hospital admission includes those who are Gravely Disabled. It will help families, primary care doctors, and all other professionals access treatment for consumers who are Gravely Disabled at a time when they cannot help themselves.