

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

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: March 19, 2021

From: Claire Weinberg, Montgomery County

Position: SUPPORT

My son had Schizophrenia, and he took his own life.

One of my long-lasting memories is that of my late husband, literally on his knees, crying and begging my son to accept treatment. This was after a year in college, when he was first diagnosed with Schizophrenia. **I don't believe he ever had any awareness of the causes of his suffering (such unawareness is called anosognosia).** Even though he was paranoid, delusional and hearing voices, he **REFUSED TREATMENT AND NEVER REALIZED THAT HE HAD AN ILLNESS.**

Since early childhood Michael was fearful and very bright, but by high school graduation was tense and sometimes behaved bizarrely. In spite of his illness, Michael managed to get a degree in horticulture from the University of Maryland. He was too fearful to seek a job, but did some manual work for a friend and odd jobs.

When I moved to a retirement community, any discussion of selling the house so frightened Michael that I kept it for him. By 1994 Michael had deteriorated and was living alone in the house, fearful and withdrawn. He stopped taking care of himself and was unkempt, depressed, paranoid, hallucinating and an utterly hopeless individual. **HE TOLD ME HE HAD ACQUIRED A GUN.** I contacted the Crisis Center to come and get the gun out of the house. They could not or would not. Michael refused voluntary hospitalization. With difficulty I petitioned the court for an emergency evaluation. The police took him to the emergency room and the doctors decided **he did not meet the dangerousness standard for involuntary admission.** Michael may not have looked to be a "danger" but he was quite obviously **seriously ill, unable to care for himself, and utterly without hope.** If Maryland law had included the provisions in this bill, he would have been hospitalized and received treatment.

Instead, **two weeks after the evaluation, he shot and killed himself.**

I am 92 now, but I blame myself daily all these many years, for not finding a way to rescue my precious son. But a system that permitted **timely involuntary hospital treatment could have saved him. Changing the hospital commitment law to help people like Michael could help prevent future suicides.**

Support HB1344!