

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

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: March 19, 2021

From: Kelly Proctor, Howard County

Position: **SUPPORT**

I have lived in Maryland my entire life and currently reside in Howard County, where I serve on our Local Behavioral Health Advisory Board. Today, I am testifying on behalf of Senate Bill 938.

Five years ago, my youngest son was diagnosed with Bipolar disorder, acute psychosis, and schizoaffective disorder. Our family went from being afraid for my son, to being afraid of him during his year and a half psychosis. Calling for assistance turned out to be very stressful because we were always asked if my son had assaulted us, by the person on the other line. It became clear that **Maryland laws are reactive and not proactive in helping families in a mental health crisis. We were often in danger, sleeping in shifts and carrying pepper spray. We were scared of the consequences of filing for an emergency petition while living with someone so unstable.**

Today, my husband and I remain hyper-vigilant in our son's interactions, always looking for signs that he is a danger to himself or others. We know that we are responsible for identifying and managing it ourselves since **the current laws do not help us. Although a mental illness diagnosis in a family is life-changing, it should not be a sentence for a lifetime of fear.**

I am confident that Maryland updating the current law defining "harm to self or others" according to HB1344, will create a proactive step in aiding those in a mental health crisis. The providers of care will be able to file for help without the fear that a family feels.

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to read my story.

Please support HB 1344.