

Testimony for HB1344--Mental Hygiene—Reform of Laws and Delivery of Services

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: March 19, 2021

From: Patricia Ranney

POSITION: SUPPORT

My experience with the effects of severe mental illness on families is by way of service with Citizens Review Board for Children. I served for 16 years in Anne Arundel County and also served as Vice Chair of the State Board of CRBC. The mandate and mission of CRBC is an advisory capacity to the courts and local departments of Social Services. CRBC reviews numerous cases of children in foster care throughout the state and Baltimore City. As reviewers we have the ability to review the personal files as well as meeting with interested parties in order to make recommendations.

Most children come into care due to substance abuse, whereby, that abuse can be a form of self medication for underlying mental illness in many cases. The revolving door of treating mental illness is apparent in the foster care system as well as in the department of corrections, and homelessness. Therefore I am in support of legislation that brings hope of sustainable treatment for severe mental illness that would enable a parent to be able to maintain his/her child/ren. The separation of a child from a parent/s is always difficult and adds to family trauma. I never heard from a child that didn't want to stay with parents. Their wish was always to 'fix' their family so that they could stay together. As a reviewer, our task is 'best interest of the child' standard, with safety being paramount, therefore parents had to reach that standard in order to keep their children or have them returned.

When mental illness is treated on parity with medical/physical illness, there will be less need to put children in foster care. Sustained treatment is key and that is what this bill addresses. Therefore I strongly urge the committee to vote favorably.