

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

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: March 19, 2021

From: Kathleen Smith- Waldorf, MD, Charles County

Position: SUPPORT

My name is Kathleen Smith, I am a resident of Charles County MD. I am a mother of an adult son who has severe mental illness and also developmental disabilities, including a form of autism. Because the current standard for dangerousness is not defined to clarify that danger need not be imminent, my son did not receive the treatment he desperately needed and received a 20 year prison sentence.

My son's growing inability to control his actions, suicidal tendencies and destructive behaviors toward himself, his family and society was what lead us to look for assistance through the Maryland Emergency Evaluation Petition System and Involuntary hospital Admission process.

The current laws did not work when my son, age 21 years old at the time, left me a message on my cell phone in the middle of the night in about June of 2007. He stated that he was standing in the middle of Crain Highway with his eyes closed, hoping a passing car would hit him. When I woke the next morning and listened to the message, I immediately called 911. Charles County Sheriffs listened to my message and told me they would do a welfare check on him at his apartment. I paid for his apartment as he could not provide food, or shelter for himself, nor did he have the insight that he has a severe mental illness. They located him at his apartment and told me that he stated he was fine. The sheriffs decided that since he was no longer in the roadway that they could not initiate an emergency petition. Clearly with Paul's history and the distraught suicidal phone message, the law should allow an emergency petition to be completed. Also, he was unable to care for himself, attempted to cause serious bodily harm to himself and was rapidly deteriorating mentally. However, with how the current law is written so vague and is interpreted as requiring imminent danger, I and the police officers were at a standstill to obtain an emergency evaluation.

If HB1344 had been in effect, then I believe that he would not be where he is today. He is currently serving a 20 year prison sentence, 60 years suspended, for entering residences at night while occupied in July 2007. Paul had voluntarily went homeless, without my knowledge, about one week after the emergency evaluation was denied and ended up being arrested for these crimes.

Treatment delayed is treatment denied. The consequences of no treatment are homelessness and criminalization. Please support HB1344 so others with serious mental illness can receive timely evaluation and hospital treatment before they deteriorate and suffer the terrible outcomes of denied treatment.