

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

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: March 19, 2021

From: Joanne L Connors, Silver Spring, Montgomery County, MD

Position: SUPPORT

I am asking you to recommend that the dangerous standard for emergency petition and involuntary hospitalization be clarified to include those who are unable to care for themselves. This would have benefited me greatly and prevented emotional pain for my child if it were implemented when I was ill 15 and 19 years ago: I suffer from schizophrenia. When well, I am employed full time in a profession job. When ill, I retreat into my own world with irrational rules. If I could have been committed when I was unable to care for myself, instead of a year later when I was a physical danger to myself or others, I could have:

- Taken FMLA so I could keep my job while hospitalized. Instead, I lost my job and was unemployed for 18 months.
- Utilized my short and/or long term disability and therefore had some replacement income for while I was disabled. Instead, I stay on the job until I get fired. By the time I get treatment, the option for short or long term disability income replacement is gone.
- Saved \$100,000 spent from my savings since it would have been replaced by the disability insurance. Instead I live off this money and spend it all.
- Maintained my health insurance through my job. Instead, I'm too ill to even think of COBRA and my insurance is gone since I lost my job. The state then picks up part of the tab for my eventual hospital stay; I end up deeply in debt for the rest of the stay.
- Saved myself from criminal prosecution. Instead, because I'm irrational, I eventually break the law. I actually spent a few hours in jail.
- Saved myself from suicide attempts, delusional mental anguish, and dangerous situations. Instead I end up at 2 a.m. lying at a bus stop crying with emotional pain and contemplating suicide, things I never do until the illness has progressed to its worst stages.
- Protected my son from the terrible impact of this illness on the children. Instead, he witnessed his mom doing "crazy" things, and suffered tremendous emotional pain from my eventual abandonment. Nothing scares a kid more than thinking no one will help their mom or dad when they need it.

In short, this is a disease with a biological basis. If a person's cancer was at Stage 0 but the doctor waited until the cancer was at Stage IV before treating it, he would be sued for malpractice. But this is what we do in the mental health field by waiting until someone is a physical danger to themselves or others. Please be a part of the early diagnosis and treatment of this disease by supporting HB1344. Please, allow me to be committed. It could save my life and the quality of my life and my son's life in the future.