

**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN OPPOSITION OF
HB 1344 – Mental Health Law - Reform of Laws and Delivery of Service**

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 19, 2021**



Health Care for the Homeless strongly opposes HB 1344, which would modify the standard for involuntary admission of individuals to mental health facilities. This bill broadens the definition of ‘danger to self or others’ to include a psychiatric deterioration consideration (among other troubling aspects), it also greatly expands the net of people who would be eligible for involuntary commitment by including people who would be “reasonably expected, if not hospitalized” to present a danger to self or others.

This bill has significant implications for personal autonomy, namely an individual’s right to not comply with a family member’s preferences for how one should live their life. For instance, a family member can order a loved one who is experiencing homelessness committed if they are “reasonably expected” to be a danger to themselves by living on the street. The decision to involuntarily commit someone is a responsibility that comes with a good deal of training, objectivity and responsibility. A family member of a person experiencing homelessness should not have the authority to decide such a clinical decision just because client is living on the street and suffering from mental health issues, unless client is a threat to him/her self or others. And in that case, 911 should be called and a clinical person should make that decision along with judge. Family dynamics can easily erode one’s ability to maintain objectivity and center safety as the primary focus for intervention. This is specifically why it is unethical for clinicians to have dual relationships with our clients.

This is a dangerous bill and should be rejected. We urge an unfavorable report.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland’s leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We work to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy, and community engagement. We deliver integrated medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.