



HELP in the HOME

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Testimony for HB1344 Mental Hygiene – Reform of Laws and delivery of Services
House Health and Government Operations Committee
Date: March 19, 2021
From: Help in the Home LLC, Rockville, Montgomery County. By Ashia Mann.
Position: **SUPPORT**

I am the MSW student intern at Help in the Home, LLC. Our agency provides support to people with severe and persistent mental illness. Services range from coordinating their care with treatment providers to daily support with med monitoring, meal prep, household chores and life skills. We also provide support for families of those diagnosed with mental illness. Many of our families have spent, and episodically continue to spend nights wondering where their loved one is and if they are safe, in jail or being mistreated, because their loved one does not meet the danger standard for involuntary treatment in Maryland and has gone missing.

I'd like to share with you the story of a mother who called us last year to update us on a client whom I will call Cassie, who thrived in our supported living community; working and taking college courses, but who disappeared in the night, without her belongings after deciding she no longer needed to take her medication.

When her mother called us, she said that Cassie was recently found by a trucker on the interstate, in Connecticut, unsure of the month and did not want to go home, or to the hospital. He had bought her clothes and food but could not convince her to seek help and did not want to call the police since she had committed no crime. Cassie's mom told us she felt so helpless, there was nothing they could do. And there was nothing our agency could offer either, but empathy. Cassie's mom said her daughter felt like she was "on a cliff". At the end of the call the parents indicated that each day, the best they could hope for was that their baby was alive, having been sent to jail or a hospital. A cliff indeed, with no safety net unless she plummeted. Cassie cannot sleep well because of her paranoia but also because the danger of living on the street poses real threat to her safety. She is unable to attend to basic physical needs but because she has not become violent, she has not met the level of danger to afford her proper care in the State of Maryland. What will it take for her to be seen as a danger to herself?

The current Involuntary Treatment Law means that a client can refuse or walk away from treatment and live like Cassie until something catastrophic happens. How can we watch as young people with mental illness suffer and their families stand by helpless, waiting until the situation becomes “dangerous enough”? Wishing for them to be hospitalized but not for irreparable health consequences? The current law requires that a person decompensate to a point that is almost guaranteed to become a public safety or personal safety catastrophe. By clarifying that a person who cannot meet their basic survival needs is “dangerous to self,” this bill will allow providers like us to help those who are refusing treatment before there are tragic consequences, and grant families an end to their unanswered questions and constant fear. It will help to save lives by providing timely treatment for those who cannot meet their basic survival needs, before it is too late.

Sincerely,

[Ashia Mann](#)

MSW Student Intern, Help in the Home, LLC Rockville MD