

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

House Health and Government Operations Committee

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From: Marilyn Martin, 11509 Emmanuel Way, Solomons, MD 20688

Position: SUPPORT

My 37-year-old son has severe schizophrenia. He now lives with his father in Montgomery County, MD.

His first psychosis occurred in 2008 when he was 24 years old. Over the past decade, I have been unable to obtain **timely treatment for him by involuntary emergency evaluation because too many community psychiatrists, police and judges have interpreted the standard to mean imminent danger of bodily harm with no consideration given to how delusional or disabled he was at the time.** When left to further deteriorate, people with these neurological disorders can indeed become physically dangerous, most often toward their own family members, who are full-time caregivers.

Just to cite three of our many examples, from the earliest to the most recent in 2016:

By 2009 he refused to take medication, and he did not believe he was ill.

When his delusions included a threat to kill someone, I petitioned the court for an emergency evaluation. The judge denied it for lack of “immediacy,” although the law no longer stated that imminent danger was required.

In April 2013, my son became so belligerent that I was afraid. His psychiatrist failed to petition for emergency evaluation. Two months later, a neighbor reported threats to the police, who also failed to petition, although finally the doctor did so.

In January 2016, he was visiting me and my husband in Chesapeake Beach. During my drive to return him to his dad’s, I grew increasingly anxious about his behavior. Once I returned home, I emailed and faxed my concerns to his clinic director and to his provider that I felt endangered by his current behavior. I asked them to get him off the medication that was failing him and to please return to the previous one that worked. I heard nothing from them.

When my son called me in February to request another visit, I hoped that he had received proper treatment. He had not, and he was even more dangerous. I was unable to convince him the next day that it was time to leave to return to his dad’s. Without warning, he came inside from the porch and picked up my 70-year-old husband by his neck. He kept pounding his fist into my husband’s head. When I tried to intervene, my son pushed me into a wall. This episode finally ended with my dialing 911. We were lucky that an officer trained in de-escalation arrived. All too often, that is not the case. The officer took my son to our local hospital, and from there, several days later, to a bed in Montgomery County for treatment.

A broadly interpreted standard leaves too many people in potential danger: the caregivers (family), the disabled people in psychosis, the police, and even the public.