

Maryland Families' perspectives on the need for Danger Standard legislation

Excerpts from previous testimony

Family One

My adult son began showing clear signs of serious mental illness. He was extremely agitated, afraid someone was following him, hearing and seeing things clearly not there. Due to the family history of serious mental illness [schizophrenia] we suspected this was an onset of his illness. [We took] him to the emergency room. He and his father met with a psychiatrist, who said my son needed to be admitted. My son told his father that the doctor had strange eyes and he was "one of those people" after him, so he wasn't admitting himself. He refused outpatient treatment. After one week my son's paranoia was worse but the judge only agreed to order an emergency petition after we reported my son's statement that he wasn't going to be around much longer, and he was sent here for a purpose and he had to fulfill that purpose.

Two sheriffs came that evening to pick my son up, but he was so paranoid by this time that he felt they were a threat to him and his family. He thought it was his duty to destroy them, resulting in the death of the two officers. My son has been incarcerated for years ever since this tragedy occurred.

Family Two

I am a close relative of a young woman suffering from a long history of schizoaffective and bipolar disorder. My relative was homeless for more than three years. She was thrown out of several shelters due to inability to conform her behavior to the rules. Although she was suffering from psychosis and unable to care for herself, the mental health professionals at two of the shelters claimed she did not meet the danger standard for emergency evaluation because she was not suicidal or homicidal. In her current psychotic state, she is unable to recognize she has an illness and refuses all treatment programs.

Recently after eviction from a shelter, my relative was out on the streets for a week. Her psychotic delusions escalated and, believing she was "saving" a young child, she tried to abduct the child from a baby-sitter while they were walking. My relative was arrested and jailed on a felony charge.

Family Three

In his early twenties my brother began hearing voices and became extremely paranoid. He refused all treatment. He attacked and choked my father severely. He was homeless almost a year. Then my aunt and her family took him in. My brother attacked my grandfather and beat my aunt and her husband in the head with a baseball bat which resulted in their hospitalization and disability.

My brother finally received medication over objection which successfully treated his psychosis. After hospital discharge, he lived in a halfway house program, got a job, and mended family relationships. Then he stopped all treatment including medications and moved out to an apartment.

Now he has started hallucinating and paranoid delusions again. He posted psychotic incoherent words as well as violent and sexually explicit messages on social media including "Feeling cute, think I might kill. I sent the mobile crisis team screen shots of his violent postings and thoughts of murder and gave them his psychiatric, violent, and criminal history.

The mobile crisis team did not find that he was dangerous enough YET to meet the current danger standard, which did not allow them to consider his past violent history while psychotic or his significant psychiatric deterioration. He was evicted and is now homeless and my family continues to live in fear of harm every day.

Family Four

My son, who had schizophrenia, began experiencing delusions that his back was broken, and his food and water were poisoned, and he quit eating and drinking and stayed in bed. I could only put ice chips in his mouth. The Mobile Crisis team refused to come to evaluate him because they said he did not meet the danger standard for emergency petition. After two weeks he was so weak he could not get up or walk and the mobile crisis team still refused to evaluate him. My petition for emergency evaluation was approved by a judge and he was sent to John Hopkins Hospital. By the time he finally received medication over objection he had lost 40 pounds and was so debilitated that he was catatonic, in a wheelchair with his eyes rolling back.

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