

Testimony for SB807

March 8, 2022, 1:30pm, Senate Finance Committee

From: Lisa Halpin, Glenwood, Howard County, MD

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Our 30-year old son, once a successful professional, now has severe mental illness and refuses all help. I cry myself to sleep at night; waiting to receive a phone call that he is hurt, has hurt someone else, or worse. I implore you to please hear me – Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) would help us save our son's life and protect our family and others from people like him who are suffering with severe mental illness.

My husband and I are Maryland business owners. We previously resided in Frederick County and have multiple family members that both live and work in Frederick. We are also the parents of four children, including a 30-year old son who is diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder and bipolar disorder and a 17-year old daughter who is developmentally disabled. I have championed both disability rights and have advocated and testified on behalf of mental health causes throughout the years. For this reason, I believe I am uniquely qualified to speak in support of this bill.

Our 30-year old son began his life as a beautiful, talented and kind young man who graduated with a B.S. in Economics from the University of Maryland. He was a Maryland homeowner working a six figure job before he suddenly began deteriorating mentally into someone we did not recognize. He suffered psychosis and began having religious delusions. He also began self-medicating with illegal drugs. Our beautiful son began spouting strange and hostile conspiracy theories, indignantly rebuffing any attempts to speak rationally to him about his changing behavior. Eventually we could only watch helplessly in horror as his life imploded. He suffers from anosognosia and does not know that he is severely mentally ill. Sadly, he showed up to our home in the middle of the night throwing large rocks through the glass windows. On one occasion he threw a rock through the window that just nearly missed hitting his developmentally disabled sister. We had to obtain a protective order and he was involuntarily hospitalized.

Once he was stabilized and released from the hospital, he got a new job and we had hope, however, he has now stopped taking his medicine and his mental health is declining rapidly again. He refuses all mental help. AOT would save my son's life. It would save him from hurting himself or others. Instead, I pleaded and begged him and was finally able to get him a telemed with a psychiatrist. We sat in the parking lot of a local mall while the psychiatrist told him he needed antipsychotic medication. He yelled at her and said it was not true. She told me she did not feel safe treating him and told me not to call back. I contacted multiple other psychiatrists who declined to see him. Now, he no longer wants to receive care and refuses to talk to us anymore.

In response to those who say that this bill would harm those with disabilities, I speak from a place of deep and personal knowledge to say that is simply just not true. My child with a disability needs protection from her brother; not protection from a generic, contrived threat that AOT could be used to cause her harm. Developmental disability is not a mental disability. However, my daughter with the developmental disability is at risk of schizophrenia. If that happens, AOT would help, not harm her as well. As a mother desperately trying to save her child; I ask you to please support this bill. It belongs in all of Maryland; not just in Frederick.