

Testimony for HB1017

March 9, 2022, 1:00 pm, House Health & Government Operations Committee

From: Michael and Ruby Robert

POSITION :FAVORABLE

We are Michael and Ruby Robert; this is our ongoing story.

Our son Andrew Robert is 34 years old. He is a husband to Lyric Robert since 2018 but they have been together since they were 17 years old. He is a father of a daughter Opal who is 3 and a son Laiken who is 18 months and a 3rd is to be born any day. For the last 10 years Andrew has been a full-time professional musician. A happy go lucky guy with lots of friends and family that love him.

Several years ago, while in Baltimore Maryland recording his second album two gunmen broke into the studio to rob them. It became quickly evident that they intended to harm them. Several of Andrews friends had small pocketknives, so when the gunmen began shooting, they pulled out the knives in hopes of saving themselves. Three of Andrews friends were shot. One man died within minutes with a fatal wound to the chest. Another was critically injured with a gun shot to the chest as well but survived because of the excellent care of the paramedics. The other friend was shot through the hand while trying to get the gun. The two gunmen were apprehended at the local hospital because they checked themselves into the ER for knife wounds. When Andrew came home that next morning he was covered in blood on his shoes, clothes and self. It was that moment un-beknown to Andrew, his loving and optimistic view of the world had been shattered and was soon to be replaced by fear, despair and isolation. He started drinking heavily and without control. At first the changes were subtle and slow. As more and more of the dominoes fell it left him overwhelmed with fear, paranoia and thoughts of suicide. When covid hit and the music venues closed he was unable to make a living for his family, that is when his life toppled.

In April of 2021 he came to us emotionally distraught and suicidal asking us for help. We were able to get him into Sun Behavioral Health not easily I might add, a psychiatric hospital in Georgetown Delaware. He spent 5 days at Sun Behavioral with a diagnosis of Major Depressive disorder, recurrent severe without psychotic features. He was released and put on a waiting list for outpatient counseling months passed without openings available. His mental condition continued to deteriorate.

In July 2021, he had his first contact with police. He had erratic paranoid behavior throughout the day, and he was obviously a danger to himself and his community at this point. He was taken by paramedics and sedated and put under suicide watch at the local hospital than transferred to Sheppard Pratt. He stayed there for 5 days and was released diagnosed with PTSD with psychosis and bi-polar. Because he has not gotten outpatient counseling or support after his first hospitalization his mental state has become grave. When he was released from Sheppard Pratt he was still in psychosis and needed mandatory outpatient support, but he still felt he wasn't sick and would not agree to it. You may ask why doesn't Andrew help himself? Because he is sick but believes he is well. This is his mental catch 22 that so many people in his condition find themselves facing. In the last few weeks, he has been in contact with police 6 times and been taken 5 times to the ER for evaluation at Union Hospital in Cecil County Md each time he was released they stated he was not a danger to himself or his community even though he was picked up by police for walking on the yellow line on a dark busy highway. Once was even through a emergency court petition and he was still released within 5 hours. Our fear at this point is that It will come to Andrew breaking a law or hurting himself or others before he can get the help he needs.

What would you do if this was your child, your wife, your husband or best friend? We are asking you to make the hard decisions so that the mentally ill of Maryland who cannot protect themselves will have the opportunity for mandatory outpatient care that can stop the endless revolving cycle of hospitalizations and releases without help.

Please help save lives and families by passing this bill (HB1017) thank you.

