

Testimony for HB1017

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

From: Kristina Rolfes, 13021 Gent Rd., Reisterstown, MD 21136

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT

AOT COULD HAVE AVERTED TRAGEDY FOR MY FAMILY, AND IF IMPLEMENTED, COULD SAVE MY NEPHEW IN FREDERICK COUNTY

If Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) had been available for my brother, he would have been under treatment and might not have violently attacked my father, leaving my father with severe traumatic brain injury, resulting in my brother spending three years of his life in a locked psychiatric hospital. If AOT was available today in **FREDERICK COUNTY**, it could prevent my ill nephew from also experiencing tragedy and enormous suffering.

My brother suffered from paranoid schizophrenia. Once a promising student, stand-out athlete and ambitious young man who started a small business, he suddenly dropped out of college, could not hold a steady job, and began showing odd and troubling behavior. He experienced bizarre delusions and auditory hallucinations. My parents took him to see a psychiatrist, but he refused any medication or further visits because he didn't believe anything was wrong (lack of insight is a symptom of the brain disorder itself). Untreated, he continued to deteriorate and suffered a severe psychotic break. During a delusional episode, he violently attacked my father, leaving him with a severe traumatic brain injury.

My brother was charged with attempted murder and eventually found not criminally responsible, spending three years in a locked psychiatric hospital where he finally received treatment. He later received group housing and community services. Once treated, he regained insight, maintained medication compliance, and lived a productive life, including working and volunteering to help others with mental illness. But he lived with guilt for the rest of his life. My father suffered lasting cognitive, balance, and vision impairments and could no longer work. I often imagine how different our lives would be if a program had been available to help him accept treatment before he deteriorated.

Now, my nephew (whose parents both had schizophrenia) is showing early signs of psychosis. He is 20 and lives in Frederick with my 74-year-old mother. He has been hospitalized several times but refuses to take medication or see a psychiatrist. He is unable to hold down steady employment, makes poor decisions, shows inappropriate social behavior, and has frequent outbursts. He does not believe anything is wrong with him. He has shown signs of violence and has spent time in jail. I believe AOT could stave off psychiatric deterioration and emotional suffering, allowing him to live a happy and productive life. Without it, I fear another tragedy will occur. He will likely end up dead, in jail, homeless, attack and harm my mother or live with life-long suffering.

Please pass this bill to create a pilot AOT program in Frederick County. My nephew's life depends on it. Please spare my family additional tragedy, suffering and lasting trauma. Since my nephew lives in Frederick, he could benefit from the pilot program to be implemented by this bill. I support the amendments presented by Delegate Lewis Young.