

**Therapon Faith Based Witness**  
**Submitted by Cheryl Clark**  
**Hearing – February 24, 2022**

As most people reflect on 2020 they will probably recall the impact that the COVID virus made on their lives. During our isolated time together the pandemic brought to surface mental challenges that my son was experiencing.

As a Class of 2020 graduate I watched in immense concern as I observed my son and his classmates withdraw and become less talkative and interactive. While talking to my son, John, I could see the spark in his eyes were diminished as he processed how the pandemic was interfering with the plans he and his classmates had made for this exciting, anticipated year. The graduating class was devastated as all that they had worked for over the past twelve years was at stake. There was immediate transition into virtual classes. No more attending basketball games, participating in spirit week and graduation celebrations. Especially, prom and the official graduation. None of that would be held!

I realized all of the circumstances beyond our control had left my then 18-year-old son in a state of despair. Despite the joy and laughter that John usually shared he was progressing forward and I thought he was at good place mentally. COVID did not interfere with college plans. He was accepted to a university that allowed only the freshman to attend for the first two semesters. Being among other freshman, even with social distancing, I thought would improve his mood socially. After his return home for Thanksgiving break it was painfully obvious, not only did his mood and mental health not improve, it had gotten worse. His response was that he didn't think college was for him and he would like to consider the military. I was not 100% on board initially, but I wanted him to pursue what he wanted for his future and I thought the discipline and guidance in the armed forces may be a good alternative.

The longer we were together during the break it became apparent this was not a passing emotion and a more serious mental matter was occurring. I consulted his primary physician. His doctor was concerned as well and asked that he be admitted to Anne Arundel Hospital for evaluation. I am thankful for the advice for admission, but I am regretful of the diagnosis. The diagnosis reflected Depression and Bipolar Disorder. This would not be as disappointing if John had not shared his desire to enlist into the military. This diagnosis had immediately disqualified him from being eligible.

I share this painful parent story with you today because every parent wants to know they have done all they can to support the interest of their child. Knowing that my son was dealing with the outcome of his diagnosis I encouraged him to participate and remain in counseling. We pursued Christian counseling and what I found is that whether male or female, zoom or non-zoom the therapist showed the LOVE of God, but they never shared the WORD of God. My son is now almost 20 years old. His circle of love is broad and includes his family, church, prior teachers, and coaches, but during this difficult time he has not always felt comfortable talking about his illness to those in this circle. As the Bible states, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God". I would like to see my son and others have the opportunity to receive Faith Based counseling which allows for the word of God to reassure their circumstances. Reminding them they are more than conquerors and that God is going to work things out for their good. I hope this Bill will be considered to give John and others the *option* to select a certified Therapon Faith Based Therapist as a counselor in the future.