



Date: March 7, 2022

To: Delegate Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair, and
Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Vice-Chair
House Health and Government Committee

From: April Sandi, MSW, LMSW, Founder/CEO, Global Necessity Corporation
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Frederick County Maryland

Re: House Bill 1017 – Frederick County – Mental Health Law – Assisted Outpatient
Treatment (AOT) Pilot Program

Position: Against

Testimony:

Thank you, Health and Government Operations members for your dedicated service to improving access and equity in behavioral health care for all Marylanders.

I am writing today to share an informational perspective on Bill 1017, which would establish an “Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)” outpatient civil commitment pilot program in Frederick County.

My position on this bill is informed by my service as a trauma therapist and social worker providing therapy to children and families in a variety of agencies, as a previous foster care social worker for DHS, a therapist for the Department of Juvenile Services, a substance abuse counselor, a school social worker in Baltimore City Schools and the founder of Global Necessity Corporation, a non profit organization that does street outreach to the homeless and communities of disparity in Frederick County, Maryland. Our website is www.globalnecessity.org.

Global Necessity Corporation is located in downtown Frederick and is contracted to provide mental health case management to On Our Own of Frederick County, Justice Jobs, and the Asian American Center of Frederick. Not only do we provide mental health case management, we also work with the Frederick County Health Department and Sheppard Pratt to refer folks to Residential Rehabilitation Programs and drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

I am very concerned about the House Bill 1017 “Assisted Outpatient Treatment Pilot Program” (AOT). As a mental health clinician who has worked with a variety of psychiatric disorders, I am concerned about the checks and balances and potential legal issues that this bill could cause. There are already procedures in place when someone is having a psychiatric emergency. I believe that the passing of this bill could impose on civil liberties and open a variety of problems to add to an already broken legal system in family courts as well as a path for folks to abuse the power that the passing of this bill could provide. I am a community mediator and work with families establishing custody in Baltimore County and can see in a variety of instances how this can be misused by folks trying to obtain full custody of their children in DHS cases and in family court. I beg of you to make absolutely certain that the appropriate checks and balances are considered for all stakeholders. Additionally, I am very concerned about providers taking advantage of this bill for financial gain. What is the vetting and oversight for providers that are making these decisions? What is the process if these decisions cause undue harm and hardship to the folks affected by this bill? Are there procedures in place to address these issues?

In Summary, I ask that additional time be spent to look at the impact and the necessity of the AOT Pilot Program and examine if there can be additional adjustments to current laws so that they can be adjusted to fill in gaps in service and process instead of passing this AOT Pilot Program. I see this bill to be potentially harmful in a variety of ways that I would like to be examined. Global Necessity would be more than happy to participate in this process to insure that folks are in control of their own mental health and recovery.

I implore the committee to consider these concerns and questions.