

**PERSONAL WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF
House Bill 1017: Frederick County – Mental Health Law –
Assisted Outpatient Treatment Pilot Program**

House and Government Operations Committee, House
March 8, 2022

Thank you Chair Pendergrass, Vice-Chair Peña-Melnyk, and committee members for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you today. My name is Mary Buckley and I am a Frederick resident. I am here to share my experiences with involuntary commitment.

I am **strongly opposed to House Bill 1017** because I have experienced forced treatment in my own life. It was traumatic, unhelpful, and damaging.

When I was 32 years old, my first hospitalization took place simply because I was experiencing extreme insomnia and my family interpreted my related behavior as odd. All I needed was sleeping pills. I was too exhausted to find a way to get them and needed someone to help me obtain them.

My family came to “help” at my house knowing I was deteriorating. I was languishing in bed upstairs alone, with little support. At this time, my sister was helping to care for my 2 young children. One night, my family member pinned me to the floor and brought me to an institution that was very abusive. I was put in four point restraints, and later secluded due to hallucinations that began after they took me away, with no explanation of why or for how long.

During my hospitalization, I was forcibly medicated and my psychiatric advance directive, detailing which medications I was not to take, was completely ignored. When discharged, they sent me home with a pack of medication and no resources for where to receive help next. The hospitalizations only made things worse. I was so traumatized by this experience that my mental health worsened significantly, leading me to be in and out of psych wards for almost 25 years. I exhibited a series of odd, but harmless behaviors due to the first hospitalization.

At first, I was diagnosed with postpartum psychosis by a psychiatrist hired by my family. In a family meeting, when asked to explain the behaviors that proved it, my family was speechless. My next “diagnosis” was bipolar disorder when in reality I believe I was experiencing trauma-induced depression and anxiety.

But there was one place that helped me feel better: a respite house. I had gone to many times before after being hospitalized, to cope with the anxiety and depression from being in the hospital.

This time I was able to heal there. It was safe, supportive, and had an atmosphere that fostered community and trust. The program was the perfect balance between structure and freedom. I had my own room, and there were people there that I could genuinely connect with, including staff. We even ate dinner as a family. There was a backyard, and we were provided transportation to doctor visits. I finally found peace and healing. I can't say enough good things

about the place. My depression and anxiety are slowly improving and I have finally found the right combination of meds.

As my old boss would say, I am certified sane.

I urge you to listen to my story, and understand the harm that forced treatment does to someone and to our service system. It's dehumanizing, disempowering and retraumatizing. It instills the belief that individuals with serious mental health issues are unable to make treatment decisions on their own. Choice-based recovery services such as the respite house I went to, provided me with a safe, comfortable space to heal and begin to recover. To create a more recovery focused behavioral health system, we need to listen to voices of people like me, who receive these services. **I urge you to vote against HB1017.**

Thank you,
Mary Buckley
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