

Good afternoon,

I am Stefany Hemmer, and I am testifying to express my strong support for HB561.

I was a psychiatric nurse for 15 years. My experience includes 2 years as an Instructor of psychiatric nursing at Howard Community College. My education includes Bachelor degrees in Behavioral Science and Nursing, and a Master's Degree in Nursing with a concentration in Legal Nurse Consulting.

Over the years, I have treated adult and pediatric patients. In my estimation, 8 out of 10 of my patients have been abused by someone close to them. This includes sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse.

I thought I would share a story of a patient which sheds light on the trauma caused by sexual abuse by a parent or caregiver. It is worth noting, this patient was admitted more than one time to the psychiatric unit. There is no "cure" for trauma-related disorders. Therefore, patients tend to spend a lifetime struggling with mental illness.

My patient's father had sexually abused him from the age of 3 to the age of 15. He subsequently developed Bipolar Disorder. This mental illness is characterized by extreme mood swings. Victims of the illness often have poor impulse control. This can lead to social, legal, family, and physical health problems. Drug use, sexual promiscuity, and illegal activity often characterize a life filled with tragedy.

Furthermore, this patient demonstrated self-harming behaviors. For example, he cut his wrists on the railings on the wall of the unit. He would run from staff to the railing and cut himself, as blood flew from his wrists.

He would scream and cry inconsolably. No medications given by mouth or injection worked to control the effects of the trauma he had experienced. Medications only served as a band-aid to curb his self-destructive behavior. The behaviors always returned after the life of the medication expired.

Patients who have been abused do not fare well as adults unless they receive support, therapy, and medications as children. It is safe to say, children who are abused who remain in close contact with the abuser are overwhelmingly doomed to a tragic outcome. Lives are ruined forever.

Again, I urge the committee to vote in support of this bill. The mental health of abused children is at grave risk when allowed to remain in contact with the abuser. We owe it to all children to do what we can to protect them and their future well-being.

As I close, let us remember the words of Frederick Douglass:

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." – Frederick Douglass

Thank you for your time.