

Testimony for SB 480 - Mental Health Law - Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs

Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Melony Griffith

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Position: SUPPORT

Hello, my name is Lisa Bass Cooper, and I am testifying to support SB 480 on behalf of my daughter, a resident of Montgomery County, Md.

My daughter developed schizoaffective disorder 19 years ago. Nearly two years later, my son showed signs of bipolar disorder, but was never adequately diagnosed. He took the keys to my car one Sunday morning and committed vehicular suicide. He was 19. If an AOT program existed at the time, he might have been able to get adequate treatment and counseling after his discharge from the hospital, only a week prior.

For nearly 10 years after his death, my daughter was medication-compliant until she turned 30 and wanted to get married and bear children. She secretly stopped taking her medication and relapsed into a rapid cycling mania that was only calmed by introducing ECT at Sheppard Pratt Hospital. She relapsed again and landed in a hospital that not only allowed her to refuse antipsychotic medications but had her arrested from the hospital for injuring a male nurse who was in her room in the wee hours of the morning. We filed a complaint with authorities on her behalf, but never received a response. My daughter, who had never been arrested or in jail, served 75 days in Montgomery County's psychiatric lockup, still being allowed to refuse medication until a competency hearing. During Covid-19 restrictions, I was unable to see her. Upon her release, I rented an apartment for her so she could be compliant with Mental Health Court and have her record expunged. She achieved that goal and graduated. Her future looked bright.

But within 48 hours, she announced she was not taking medication because of the threat of developing tardive dyskinesia. She went unmedicated for five months, until she became very ill and went through a revolving door of rapid cycling mania and delusions about having children. Eventually, after nine (9) hospitalizations over a 15-month period, she is on an ECT regimen that appears to be working. I'm pleased today that she has been discharged into a decent apartment in Silver Spring, Maryland, where she will have support of a live-in aide and a HOC-subsidized voucher she applied for nearly three years ago. However, at any point, she may lose insight into her illness, and will need a law like the one before you today to maintain some equilibrium and purpose in her life.

Senators, I hope that you will join many other states that understand mental illness and pass this important legislation, SB 480. Thank you for listening.