

January 10, 2022

Dear Governor Elect Wes Moore,

I am excited for the new change that you will help bring to our dear state of Maryland that deeply needs it. I am reaching out to you today in desperation to help change Maryland's approach to handling mental health crisis from those who do not present imminent threat to others.

My days and nights are consumed with the same fears each day. Is today going to be the day I get the call that my brother killed my mom when he was detached from reality in a psychosis state? Is today going to be the day the police protect themselves and in doing so kill my brother? Is today the day that an EMT will need to take a permanent leave for an injury he sustained at a home he responds to more than 2x a week since there are so many emergencies that go on at that address?

First to help you understand better let me introduce my only brother Joshua. In 2016, Joshua was t-boned by a drunk driver that resulted in a TBI, epilepsy, substance abuse addiction, schizophrenia and postcoital psychosis. Joshua can't explain to you how he feels to identify that how he feels isn't safe for himself or others. Joshua has paranoia about taking medication and it is terribly difficult to get him to comply with his medication regimen. Joshua has had over 220 hospital admissions since his accident, and it continues due to loopholes in Maryland law that prevent him from getting his needed medical care.

My brother is so sick he cannot even recognize it nor know that his lack of addressing it is causing further damage to his brain. My brother's condition is deteriorating to a point where he does not have quality of life. He has no friends or associates outside of his immediate family and at times he doesn't even know who we are even though we've been part of his entire life.

My brother has been approved for long term skilled nursing for his medical conditions only to be denied due to his mental health status. Mental health treatment isn't even a thing for him. The therapists say that since he has cognitive decline, he doesn't benefit by learning skills as he can't retain what he is learning. Even chemical restraints are no longer working. You know since he was given them 3 to 4 times weekly and they eventually became something his body got used to. I can't admit how many times I played out if assisting suicide would be the best way to help my brother because every other effort, I have tried hasn't gotten us anywhere.

Doctors always give me the same spiel which goes something like "we feel so terribly sorry for what your brother and family is going through but Joshua said he isn't going to hurt himself or others and we can be liable if we force him to get treatment against his cooperation and we are going to have to discharge him". Thankfully, I don't have to tell EMT, police or hospital his name anymore. He is the most frequent return guest with over 500 calls for service to 911 and over 300 trips to the hospital. Yet still the cycle continues for us.

What is even sadder is we aren't the only family fighting this battle. I have met so many wonderful people through my fight for advocacy for my brothers need for treatment that have lost loved ones at the hands of mental illness of another loved one and I am begging you to help stop that statistic now.

There are some very simple changes to Maryland Law that can help get Joshua and others like him the help they deserve and need even when they are too sick to recognize it. For example, Assisted

Outpatient Treatment (AOT) which is court ordered outpatient treatment for those who are unwilling to engage or commit in treatment by own free will. This will help Joshua and others like him with severe and persistent mental illness from deteriorating further from mental decline, reduce ER visits for return Eps and mental health crisis, reduce family deaths by those with severe mental illness, prevent crime and less burn out to care takers and family members.

I am trying to make this as short as possible in hopes you read it all the way through, but the truth is I could go on and on for days on how traumatic this has been for our family. We need your help and are depending on you not to leave our loved one and others who suffer severe and mental illness behind.

Warmest Regards,

Laura Shears Coates