



**Testimony by Lisa Dailey, Executive Director of Treatment Advocacy Center
Submitted to Senate Finance Committee
Hearing regarding SB 480: February 28, 2023
POSITION: STRONG SUPPORT**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. I am writing as the executive director for Treatment Advocacy Center, a national nonprofit focused on eliminating barriers to treatment for those with severe mental illness. I am also writing as the sibling of someone who has benefited greatly from and is probably alive today because of her enrollment in assisted outpatient treatment (hereafter AOT) in a state that has made this treatment tool available for decades as part of its regular treatment continuum (Wisconsin).

I am certain that many will provide testimony about the need for AOT to address resistance to treatment on the part of individuals with severe mental illness. I am writing about the need for AOT to prevent treatment systems from simply opting to ignore the most difficult cases. My sister never refused medication. Without support from a treatment team, however, she could not maintain stability and her county of residence did not want to work with her because she could be difficult and combative. Without a court order there was no accountability for failing to even attempt to find the right medication or to check on her welfare periodically.

Her combativeness and volatility were of course directly due to her unmanaged symptoms, but without a court order there was nothing preventing her treatment team from dropping her. They could then wait for her to become so chaotic and dangerous that she would eventually be admitted to inpatient treatment in another county, usually in the back of a police car after a dangerous and traumatic encounter. They could wash their hands of any responsibility for her wellbeing or for the safety of our family or the community. I realize this is not the case in all places but where it *is* an issue, court involvement is the only remedy.

What finally made the difference for our family was an AOT order that did not allow her to be dropped when she was the most symptomatic. During court hearings, she liked the involvement of a neutral judge to ensure that there was accountability if the county failed to provide what was required in her treatment order. She knew that while under court order she needed to refrain from using drugs and alcohol and *actually did so*. This period of supervised treatment led to her finally being stabilized on the right medication for her after more than a decade of only partial relief from her symptoms. She needed that structured time to stabilize, and that only happened under the supervision of a judge preventing a reluctant treatment team from washing its hands of her.

She is now stable in the community, not under a court order of any kind, and has maintained her treatment on her own. There is no question that if she lived in Maryland instead of Wisconsin she would almost certainly not have recovered enough to find the right medication to get her life back, and she agrees with this. She wishes that the intervention had happened sooner to prevent some truly awful experiences that she lived through when in psychosis. I ask that you pass SB 480 from the committee and extend this same chance to Marylanders affected by severe mental illness, who deserve to recover just as much as she did.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Dailey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.