

Schaefer Testimony for MCF

In 2007, I graduated with a PhD in brain science. I had spent the last 6 years of my life understanding how a brain develops, what harms it, and testing ways to fix it. One of my hypotheses is that I could use embryonic stem cells to fix the damaged brain (in ferrets). This was a hot button political issue, which led me to Capitol Hill to speak to legislators about the science.

By the time I graduated, I was mom to two beautiful girls, accepted into a prestigious science policy fellowship program in DC and ready to have my third child.

This is the child, that taught me, for all my skills, expertise and knowledge about the brain, and how to advocate, I was lost, exhausted and fighting a system that felt impossible to navigate. How could someone like me, a consummate advocate for my child, get nowhere in spite of hours a week, week after week, month after month, year after year, attempting to get my child the services he needed to address his behavioral issues stemming from a mental health diagnosis, fail? It was impossible to hold a team together, therapists were leaving their practice faster than the season's change. The waitlist for psychiatrists was extensive. When we did get a psychiatrist, she was late or never showed up for the appointment. The therapist never bothered to speak with the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist never met with the pediatrician. This was in spite of my arranging appointments for the providers to speak to one another and work as a team.

By the time my child turned 13, he had been emergency petitioned by the county's mobile crisis social workers several times. This meant my young boy, while cuddling his emotional support dog, was handcuffed, and put in the back of a police car to be transported to the ER. This was traumatic for him and he hated me for it. It made him angrier, not better! We sat in the ER for days, missing school, missing work, and most of all, missing my girls, who were waking up alone, and going to sleep alone, while I spent 15 hours a day by my son's bedside. The psychiatric treatment facility did little to improve the situation. I spent 4-5 hours a day taking him to and from the partial hospitalization program, exhausted, fighting traffic jams, trying to stuff work and parenting into the few remaining hours a day. My heart was broken, my contribution to society as a brain scientist was losing ground, and my girls were being deprived of time with their *mama*.

Everyone knew my son was struggling. The pediatrician said, "he's my most labile patient". The psychiatrist said, "this is my most difficult case". Despite their concerns, no one seemed to know what to do, how to work as a team or how to support the family. My girls were suffering; one became suicidal, and the other was having panic attacks.

Everyday, became another game of whack-a-mole, with me trying to prevent the train from coming off the tracks, clearly stating the need, and coming up empty handed, over and over again.

In February of 2022, I spoke to a friend, who put me in touch with a mom, who had used an educational attorney to support her child's needs. I reached out to the attorney, and he was the first person to share with me the Montgomery County services that could help my child. It's unfortunate that the pediatrician, therapist, psychiatrist, Suburban Hospital or Dominion Family Case Manager had no

knowledge of the program. I filled out the forms and an angel came to my house. This was Ms. Grey from the Interfamily Preservation Services of YMCA. This was the start of wrap around services via Montgomery County that allowed me to breath again. She met all three children; she asked my son questions, and she understood our needs. I finally felt supported, she too set about to find a therapist, talk to my son when he was at his worst instead of emergency petitioning him. She got him a male mentor. A tough on the outside, kind, and warm on the inside fellow. The mentor moved the needle. He taught my son real life lessons. My son was heard, validated, and respected. Not handcuffed, transported, and stuck in an ER Day in and day out.

Understanding my son's needs, Ms. Grey made the recommendation for wrap around services. In August of 2022, we received the support of wrap around services via a community social services agency known as JSSA, that is in charge of providing wrap around services on behalf of the county. The case manager from JSSA was another earth angel- Mildred Mends. She came to the home, went to his school and continued to advocate for the services my son needed. This included keeping the same mentor for my son which was invaluable for his stability and wellbeing. Finally, I had someone that could allow me the bandwidth to put in an 8-hour day that my job required. With Ms. Mends support, my son did not need another emergency petition.

Every child in the state deserves the outreach to stay in the home when possible. These children do not belong in the ER, missing school, parents missing work, siblings being left alone and lifelong memory of being treated like a complete failure.

Constituents of this state: should not feel overwhelmed, exhausted, and denied the support they need- their careers and families suffering, because the state's policymakers were not willing to provide in home services that many families deserve. I urge our legislature to consider these in home services as a basic human right.

Maryland Legislature should pass HB 322/SB 255, to improve the Targeted Case Management and 1915(i) programs to fund wrap-around services for children like my son.