

SB480 Testimony

Marianne Eichenberger

Position: SUPPORT

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I am an advanced practice mental health nurse of over 40 years living in Howard County in District 12. I am here testifying as an individual in support of bill SB480 Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT).

The evidence shows that severely mentally ill clients that do not receive treatment in earlier stages of their illness or that have had to have multiple re-stabilization have a poorer response to future treatment and poorer long-term outcomes. It is critical to get these individuals whose judgment, reasoning and/or inability to control their behaviors into treatment so they (the clients) can make informed decisions regarding their future treatment.

AOT Nationwide for mentally ill individuals that spent 1 or more nights in a prison decreased from 12.7% to 7.1%. AOT decreased homelessness for those that spent 1 or more nights homeless from 13.6% to 7%. States using AOT are showing significant cost declines for mental health services for those on AOT (New York 50% in the first year, Ohio 40% in Summit County).

I have worked with numerous seriously mentally ill clients that described the horrors of being homeless, searching for food in garbage cans or begging for food, not understanding that the voices they hear were not real or the erroneous beliefs that they were experiencing were incorrect. These clients have been assaulted/rapped on the streets and have had numerous hospitalizations (over 5 and many as high as 10/15) before committing a crime and being hospitalized in a forensic mental health hospital. As an outpatient therapist I have had the privilege of seeing these clients successfully move into group homes/independent living, manage their finances, reconnect with family/friends, get jobs, and get their first pet (the happiness in the client's face will be something I will never forget). AOT would have begun the treatment process at a time when these clients judgment and ability to reason were seriously impaired. It would have been much more cost effective, safer for the clients, and much more humane.

I ask all members to support this bill and the seriously mentally ill.

I appreciate the time you have taken to consider this vital issue.

Marianne Eichenberger, RN, PhD