

Testimony for HB823 – Assisted Outpatient Treatment
Health and Human Services Committee
March 14, 2023, 1:00 p.m.
From: Marilyn J. Martin
Position: SUPPORT

My adult son has lived with schizophrenia for years and was finally diagnosed in 2008. He has been hospitalized at least 18 times since then. One of the worst periods was the two years preceding his psychosis-induced assault upon my then 71 -year-old spouse. Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) would have been enormously helpful in preventing his decline. My son had never been violent prior to this.

My son has never reacted well to change. When the nurse providing my son's monthly medication injection left his outpatient clinic, my son refused the prescribed injection from the new nurse. The only medication he would agree to taking was one that had previously stopped working for him. That was when my son needed AOT. Studies show that AOT can dramatically improve treatment outcomes and substantially reduce the likelihood of repeat hospitalization and criminal justice involvement for its target population.

Instead, my son deteriorated so much that he assaulted my then 71 -year-old husband, who ended up on the floor, bloodied from head wounds, and traumatized. My son now has a criminal conviction. Only after committing a crime could my son get court-ordered outpatient service. Statistics from other states show that the program works due to the "black robe effect" of going before a special judge provided by the AOT program. He also received three years of probation and is now stuck with a criminal record. The State of Maryland requires a 15-year waiting period before any expungement can be attempted. I hope that I am still alive in 2034 to attempt an expungement on his behalf.

My son has succeeded in remaining effectively medicated since the assault. So, the "black robe effect" did work in his case. However, an Assisted Outpatient Treatment program would have achieved that same outcome much more compassionately than the criminal justice system.

Not only does AOT work compassionately for those with brain disorders, but it also saves money. It reduces costs for police, incarceration, judicial systems, and hospitals. Please support this legislation.