



Sheppard Pratt

Written Testimony

Senate Finance Committee
House Health and Government
Operations Committee

SB480 / HB823 Mental Health Law - Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs

February 23, 2023

Position: SUPPORT

Sheppard Pratt thanks the Maryland General Assembly for your longstanding leadership and support of mental and behavioral health providers in Maryland. This testimony outlines the Sheppard Pratt **support of SB480 / HB823 Mental Health Law - Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs**. It is our hope that the Maryland General Assembly vote a favorable report on this legislation.

Assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) is the practice of delivering outpatient treatment under a civil court order to small, high-risk subsets of individuals with severe mental illness (SMI). The court and the mental health system work collaboratively to assist individuals with SMI to engage in treatment and ensure that the mental health system is attentive to their needs. The order requires following an individualized treatment plan, designed with input from the AOT participant and monitored by the local mental health system.

Importantly, AOT has been shown to significantly reduce hospitalizations, arrests, incarceration, homelessness, violence, and victimization in states where it is practiced.

Maryland is one of only three states without a statute enabling AOT. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) has supported establishment of AOT programs in new communities with over 40 grants since 2018. There are active AOT programs in more than 135 counties across 31 states. New York and New Jersey mandate AOT state-wide.

Sheppard Pratt stresses that AOT will be most effective if the individuals involved have access to stable and effective outpatient behavioral health services, and that will happen most effectively if the State continues to increase funding for services that are currently available and creates funding for new services not currently available such as Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers.

As a society, and as health care providers, we must strive for autonomy in the health care decision making process. However, there are exceptional circumstances for a very small subset of the community who do not have the cognitive functions to make such decisions. AOT is designed for this subset of our community with SMI – those caught in the mental (and general) health system revolving door who are unwilling or unable to voluntarily engage with treatment.



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There is considerable evidence that AOT has been of great benefit to those that suffer from mental illness and the community they reside in. Less time in the hospital, fewer visits to emergency departments, and fewer incidences of violence and arrests are clearly a benefit to everyone. It is imperative that implementation of an AOT is done with the input of patients, providers, government funders, courts, and law enforcement in order to fully realize the benefits.

Sheppard Pratt urges you to vote a favorable report on **SB480 / HB823 Mental Health Law - Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs**.

About Sheppard Pratt

Sheppard Pratt is the nation's largest private, nonprofit provider of mental health, substance use, developmental disability, special education, and social services in the country. A nationwide resource, Sheppard Pratt provides services across a comprehensive continuum of care, spanning both hospital- and community-based resources. Since its founding in 1853, Sheppard Pratt has been innovating the field through research, best practice implementation, and a focus on improving the quality of mental health care on a global level. Sheppard Pratt has been consistently ranked as a top national psychiatric hospital by *U.S. News & World Report* for nearly 30 years.