

## **Eichenberger\_ HB823\_Support**

### **Testimony for Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT)**

Date: 3/10/2023

From: Marianne Eichenberger, Howard County

**Position: SUPPORT**

I am an advanced practice mental health nurse of 40 years living in Howard County. I support the bill for Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT). I have worked with many seriously mentally ill clients that due to their illness (delusions and /or hallucinations) have refused treatment and ended up homeless or worse arrested for a criminal behavior and hospitalized in a forensic mental health facility. It is critical to get these individuals whose judgment, reasoning and/or inability to control their behaviors into treatment so they can make informed decisions regarding their future treatment.

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. AOT Nationwide for mentally ill individuals that spent 1 or more nights in a correctional facility from 12.7% to 7.1% and 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 a client that due to delusions that she was being poisoned remained on the streets homeless, awake and fearful every night because the individual had been raped in a shelter and begging for food. The client was admitted numerous times to short stay admissions and discharged to the shelter. This client would not remain in the shelter and finally ended up in the forensic system where they were able to get treatment. I began treating this client in the outpatient setting after the forensic hospitalization and the client was on SSDI, living in a group home where they were able to get their first pet. It took the client 8 years to get to this point. The expression of happiness when discussing this animal is something I will never forget. AOT would have begun the treatment process at a time when the client judgment and ability to reason were seriously impaired. It would have been much more cost effective, safer for the client, 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