

Testimony for HB 823 – Mental Health Law - Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs

Health and Government Operations Committee

Chair: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk

Date: March 14, 2023, 1:00pm

From: Jackie Robinson, Waldorf, MD 20603

POSITION: SUPPORT

My name is Jackie Robinson I am asking for your support of the AOT bill. It is desperately needed to save lives and improve the quality of life for mentally ill people like my daughter and their families.

Jasmine first developed psychotic symptoms in 2014 when she was just 16. She had nightmares, severe anxiety, paranoia, and hallucinations. She would scream and run from the creatures/demons chasing her. During hospitalization at Children’s National Hospital, she was awake for days before becoming catatonic. The cause was thought to be lupus cerebritis – the neuropsychiatric manifestation of lupus – when lupus antibodies were found in her cerebrospinal fluid. She as discharged on her lupus medication and Abilify for her psychotic symptoms. On this treatment regimen, Jasmine did well in high school and was accepted at the Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston. In 2020 she graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in engineering.

November 2020: On Thanksgiving we were in Massachusetts with family when her psychosis returned. She became manic and paranoid. After brief treatment at a hospital in New Bedford we brought her back to Maryland where she was admitted to Medstar Washington Hospital Center. The workup showed no signs of lupus effecting the brain and she was diagnosed with schizophrenia for the first time, beginning our journey with serious mental illness. The catatonia is part of her schizophrenia but it is particularly dangerous because of her lupus. After discharge she saw a psychiatrist but refused the treatment she recommended. Jasmine was now 22 years old and we had legally lost the ability to protect her despite her complete lack of insight.

July 2021: Jasmine was hospitalized in the Medstar Southern Maryland Hospital Center. She refused any treatment and they could not hold her as she was not a threat to herself or others. She was discharged in a manic state and hallucinating. She refused the psychiatric follow up appointment made for her.

October 2021: While in Massachusetts living with her father, we were able to achieve a 6-week court ordered admission. She had been starving herself and the doctor feared that she would die without intervention. Jasmine began monthly antipsychotic injections and was doing well when released – the closest to her baseline she had been since her schizophrenia diagnosis in 2020. But a few months after discharge, she refused the injections and offered oral alternative.

August 2022: Jasmine was again hospitalized in Massachusetts. After a 3-week stay she was discharged on a bi-monthly injections and daily oral medication. She returned to Maryland with me and remains on this regimen, but it is a daily struggle trying to get her to take it. I fear that she will soon hurt me over this conflict.

January 26: Jasmine began, crying, screaming, and cussing me out when I tried to get her to take her medication. She said, "I want you dead. You need to die. I am going to kill you. You are an evil person. You give me medicine that causes cancer and takes away my super powers. I am not sick. There is nothing wrong with me. I have superpowers that no one can understand – especially the doctors. Doctors can't understand engineers."

January 31: While getting ready to fly to Boston for her bi-monthly injection in Brockton, she became irate, repeating all the insults and threats. Only the threat of seeking hospitalization got her to be sufficiently cooperative to board the plane.

February 5: Jasmine returned to live with us and we were able to find a new doctor at Alliance Behavioral Health. She continues to take medication but not the optimal combination recommended. I fear she will at some point refuse to take any medication and end up back in the hospital. I also fear that either she or I will end up injured or dead.

My smart daughter – who was my best friend – has never had any real insight into her illness and there is no hope that will change without the right medication, support, and care that could be provided by court supervised Assisted Outpatient Treatment.

Please help her and patients like her in this state by voting for HB 823.