

HB823 Testimony, House Health and Government Operations Committee,
March 14, 2023
Dr. Sarah Van Remmen, MD
Position: SUPPORT

I am an emergency psychiatrist and associated medical director of psychiatric emergency services for one of the largest hospitals in Baltimore. I am also an inpatient attending psychiatrist who cares for patients with severe mental illness. Every month my team in the psychiatric emergency room learns that another one of our patients has died or been incarcerated because they did not have the opportunity for assisted outpatient treatment.

D- young person with living with schizophrenia who was murdered while attempting to find food and a warm place to sleep.

J- a young person living with schizophrenia and traumatic brain injury who was incarcerated for exposing themselves in public. Later that same year they were resuscitated after accidental overdose and was hypothermic due to homelessness.

D- a young person living with schizoaffective disorder who was just released from state hospital where she was sent after assaulting one of our psychiatrists. They have already become homeless again and are no longer taking medications.

J- a young person living with schizophrenia who went missing for weeks before being brought to our hospital as a Doe by police. They were so catatonic that they couldn't tell us their own name. Their family was terrified that they had been killed.

I have more stories than it is possible to tell in a single page testimony. And they all have the same theme- these people were directly harmed because their illness prevented them from receiving outpatient psychiatric treatment. Their inability to recognize their own need for treatment has led to direct harm.

I feel very strongly that AOT is necessary to help this small group of vulnerable individuals. Under the current system, these people are held captive by illness. Being able to provide them with adequate treatment allows them to regain autonomy over their own lives again. It is heartbreaking to see the patients we care for being harmed while we are powerless to intervene until after it's too late.

Until after they're assaulted their psychiatrist again.

Until after they're found in an alley frozen again.

Until after their family files a missing persons report again.

Until another is murdered.

We have the ability to treat these individuals, Please vote in favor of HB823 so that we can. My patients cannot keep waiting to be treated with the dignity and respect that they inherently deserve.