

Written Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 453:
Mental Health - Emergency Evaluation and Involuntary Admission Procedures
and Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs

Thank you to Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and to the committee members for your time.

My name is Mindy Morgan, here to state my opposition to Senate Bill 453. I am a mother of three, a taxpayer, and a clinical social worker with over 20 years in the mental health field.

I am 44 years old and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at age 21. I have been hospitalized three times. As I fought for stability back then, I maintained a full-time job as the sole provider for my family of five.

In my last hospital stay I was held against my will. I was not assessed to be a risk, but I was not allowed to discharge because I was told I needed help. As a result of this forced treatment, I didn't realize I needed help. I just did what it took to get out... and now I fear hospitals. Forced treatment traumatized me to the extent that I no longer will access any hospital for mental health care. This may put my life at risk one day if I am ill again.

In the end, the people I trusted helped me find my way to effective treatment. In all my experiences personally and professionally, people don't change because their hand is forced. They change because they trust.

From a provider's perspective, people struggle to engage with care because treatment systems are broken. Evidence based practices like ACT teams, WRAP providers, peer programs, First Episode Psychosis and respite are on long waits because of severe underfunding and availability issues despite their success rates. AOT is not an evidence-based practice, yet we are proposing to fund that instead. Why aren't we funding what already exists, is backed by strong evidence, and has people waiting in long lines to get in?

Last year was discussed by a fellow speaker that in other states, less than 1/3 to 1/4 of AOT petitions filed against individuals were found to be legitimate. If this is the case, 750 out of 1,000 individuals would be pulled into court to defend themselves against accusations of being "too ill to care for themselves" without justification. Where is the evidence showing the extraordinary results making it so worth traumatizing so many and wasting so much money on the judges, lawyers and psychiatrists for the 66-75% whose petitions were not legitimate?

Please let's stop focusing on those with mental health issues as though we are the problem. We aren't. Let's instead fund effective programs that already exist... the ones patients cannot access due to availability. ACT teams. Peer programming. WRAP providers. First Episode Psychosis. Respite. Please use our taxpayer dollars wisely. Please use resources on what works. Thank you for your time.

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