

SB453 SUPPORT

Ellen Kobler, Carroll County
Senate Finance Committee

I am writing to voice my strong support for legislation to facilitate locally-based Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) in Maryland jurisdictions.

My older brother, who has suffered from Schizophrenia all his adult life, could have benefitted tremendously from such a program just last year. Because AOT was not an option a few years ago, he suffered a terribly protracted and dangerous months-long decline, that included his losing his home and his job. This culminated in his being arrested and jailed for inappropriate public behavior.

Despite unanimous recognition among his family members, counselors, and healthcare practitioners that he was off his meds, suffering from psychosis, and headed for certain disaster; we had no ability to convince him to get adequate inpatient treatment. If there had been an AOT program in Baltimore or Harford Counties, I am very confident he would have complied with court-ordered treatment.

I can tell you from this recent, agonizing first-hand experience, that it is critically important that we as a society develop more effective approaches to help individuals with severe mental illness access the treatment they desperately need, but may resist due to their disease-related impaired thinking.

Despite numerous attempts, it was only after my brother's arrest that were we able to secure an Emergency Petition that directed him into inpatient hospital treatment, where he was stabilized enough to agree to participate in wraparound community-based services. Looking back, my brother agrees that, at the time, he was unable to make rational decisions for his own care. He did, however, respond in a respectful and compliant manner to the judge and court personnel during his criminal case proceedings, and I'm confident he would have been responsive months earlier if a judge had ordered treatment for him.

For the sake of mentally ill people, their families, and the community at large, I hope that you will choose to make AOT an available resource to the residents of Maryland. I am very impressed with the documented benefits of similar programs in other states and hope that we can offer AOT to encourage people to get the help they need but cannot necessarily request for themselves.