



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

February 20, 2024

TO: The Honorable Pam Beidle
Chair, Finance Committee

FROM: Marc Elrich
County Executive

RE: Senate Bill 453, *Mental Health - Emergency Evaluation and Involuntary Admission Procedures and Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs*

I support Senate Bill 453 with amendments to ensure that counties receive fiscal support from the State for the creation and administration of assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) programs.

Among other provisions, Senate Bill 453 establishes AOT programs in the State for the treatment of serious mental illness and mandates that counties establish an AOT program. Under the bill, serious mental illness is defined as a substantial disorder of thought, mood, or orientation that significantly impairs judgment, behavior, or capacity to recognize reality or to reason or understand, and if not treated, creates a substantial risk of serious harm to the individual or others. The bill also establishes that a petition for AOT may be made by a director of a mental health program receiving state funding or by an individual 18 years or older who has legitimate interest in the welfare of the respondent.

Currently in Maryland, AOT is available only through a Baltimore City pilot program (created by CH576 of 2017), exclusively available to individuals transitioning out of involuntary inpatient treatment and who have a mental illness diagnosis. Maryland is one of only three states in the country without comprehensive AOT laws. Assisted outpatient treatment has reduced rates of hospitalization, arrest, and incarceration in states where it has been implemented. I support AOT as a means to keep individuals with serious mental illness safe and to create an additional path to access much-needed treatment.

I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report with amendments to Senate Bill 453 to provide State funding to counties to establish and operate AOT programs.

cc: Members of the Finance Committee