

Jake Carlo  
(443) 808-3221  
jake.d.carlo@gmail.com

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF  
*SB 453 - Mental Health - Emergency Evaluation and Involuntary Admission Procedures and  
Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs*  
Finance Committee

Thank you Madam Chair and committee members. My name is Jake Carlo. I am a Baltimore resident and a trauma survivor.

I'm writing to urge you to vote against SB 453. I myself have received forced psychiatric treatment that was both damaging to my standing in the community and a significant setback on my own path to recovery.

In April of 2021, three close friends had come to the decision, without consulting me, that confinement and forced treatment was what was best for me at that time, and called on the police to help them enforce their decision. I had not done anything that would warrant detainment under normal legal circumstances and my friends were aware that I had both a medical prescriber and a therapist that I was working very closely with at the time. But rather than attempt to engage and support me through my own, very robust, recovery process, they chose instead the quickest way to address their own feelings of discomfort with my situation.

What I really needed in this moment was a calm environment and someone who would listen and support me, but instead my friends called the police. They came to my home and surrounded me. I felt terrified. I was taken away to the hospital in the back of a police car.

In previous years, when I was struggling and didn't know where else to turn, I had myself sought treatment through hospital emergency rooms and crisis centers. I was always either turned away or offered a form of treatment that was economical for the hospital but not appropriate to my situation. It was never a positive experience, and always led to more stress and hardship. I told my friends I would not subject myself to that same experience yet again, particularly when I was already receiving voluntary care.

I didn't want to lose all control over my mental health treatment, and I didn't want to surrender my rights as a citizen. At the hospital I refused to sign any of the admission forms I was presented with for fear of signing my rights away. I did not learn until later that simply by the act of refusing to sign those forms, I became subject to a rule requiring immediate confinement to their locked ward, and lost the very rights I had sought to protect.

I was held on the ward for ten days pending a medical review board hearing to be involuntary admitted to an inpatient unit. During that time I was not allowed to access my phone to look up the numbers I needed to contact friends and family. I was cut off from the world almost entirely during that time.

I learned that by rule I had access to the hospital's care advocate, but regular and repeated requests to meet with that advocate, made over the course of days, were not followed up on by staff.

At one point, a duty nurse became angry at my insistence on accessing the care advocate, and called in security to have me physically restrained, so that she could inject me with a powerful sedative – although to this day I don't actually know what I was given.

I literally begged the staff not to do this to me as they pinned me in a chair, and one of my only positive memories of this time is of the tears I saw in a young guard's eyes as she watched them put the needle in. It was the single moment of empathy that I experienced during that time, and the only indication I was given – albeit silent – that I was something more than a recalcitrant mental patient. Sadly, this one small moment of humanity was granted me by someone who themselves had little to no power within the institution.

I later learned that the nurse's actions violated Maryland state law, that it is, in fact, illegal to administer drugs against a patient's wishes outside of a threat to life and limb.

No therapeutic services were available to those confined on the ward; there was no 'treatment' happening. It was in essence a holding cell. After one ten-minute review with a psychiatrist, I was told that my medication would be drastically changed. I knew that there were very real dangers associated with such drastic changes, because I had suffered through them before. But my concerns were ignored.

Back on the ward, however, what I learned was that in order to survive the next ten days, and avoid a further 90 day minimum of incarceration, I needed to stay quiet or comply, that I couldn't ask for what I truly needed without being seen as defiant.

In the end, and with the assistance of a legal advocate provided by the good offices of Disability Rights Maryland (DRM), I was provided with a conditional release, contingent on an agreement to take the new medications, despite the risks. I succumbed to the coercion, I took the medications, and waited another day for my release.

I later learned, again through DRM's efforts, that the diagnosis in my hospital chart was wrong, was in fact provided initially by the very people who had called the police to detain me, and that my own medical provider was never consulted.

**In other words, the assumption that I lacked insight into my own mental state and was treatment noncompliant directly resulted in the harmful care that I received.**

The consequences of that incarceration haunt me to this day, and are what have motivated me to reflect on my experiences today with you, Maryland's leaders, so that we as a state do not subject even more of our citizens to these experiences than we already do.

You and I know, anyone who has had any contact with the system knows that we need more supports for those who have survived trauma – people this bill labels “mentally ill.”

But even more importantly, **we need the *right kind of supports*.**

Cloaked in seemingly benign language that says “We want to help those who most need it,” this bill in fact is an attack on the very foundation of mental health recovery: self-regard and self-determination.

This bill’s answer to the brokenness of our public mental health system is to pile on an even greater burden on that system, and to rob our citizens of their fundamental rights – in short, to make matters worse by the same means that brought us to this point.

This bill perpetuates the notion that trauma survivors are bettered by being treated as incapable of participating meaningfully in their own care.

We are your residents, your citizens, your voters, and we are not less than human.

So I urge you again to vote against SB 453, and thank you for your time.