

HB576 Testimony

Shannon Harris, Montgomery County, District 18

Position: SUPPORT

Since 1986, efforts to pass legislation authorizing Assisted Outpatient Treatment in Maryland have been unsuccessful. This seems outrageous taking into consideration that AOT laws have been passed in 47 other states.

I have been a professional in the mental health field for 15 years and I have seen too many individuals with serious mental illness, their families, and their communities, face needless suffering resulting from the absence of AOT in Maryland.

AOT is the practice of delivering outpatient treatment under a civil court order for those who refuse or repeatedly stop treatment. According to the Treatment Advocacy Center, approximately 40% of people diagnosed with bipolar disorder and half of people diagnosed with schizophrenia have a neurological condition called anosognosia which prevents them from having insight into the need for treatment. It is the same symptom that many people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia are impacted by. Anosognosia is thought to be the most common reason why people with serious mental illness do not seek treatment. Without AOT, they cycle through hospitalizations, jail and/or homelessness. AOT reduces these outcomes between 77 and 87 percent.

I support AOT because the residents of Maryland with serious mental illness and their families deserve every opportunity to live happy and healthy lives. AOT will increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for people with serious mental illness who suffer from anosognosia. Please put a stop to the needless suffering of people with serious mental illness and their families. The passing AOT legislation can truly save lives.

I am respectfully asking you to support HB 576, to institute this life-changing treatment.