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HB576 Testimony

SUPPORT

I am testifying today in support of HB576. My 20 year-old-son Herbert Randall has had 10 inpatient Psychiatric hospitalizations and is now voiceless in a maximum-security prison because Maryland does not offer assisted outpatient treatment. I am writing to urge you to support HB576.

After his 10 inpatient hospitalizations, he was never offered Assisted Outpatient Treatment. Had that opportunity been made available to him, he may have not cycled in and out of hospitals, and may not be in prison today.

Bertie was sixteen when he was first hospitalized and although I spent over a million dollars to try to provide him care, Maryland did not support these efforts by providing Assisted Outpatient Treatment. My efforts have been in vein.

In 2020 doctors diagnosed him with early onset Schizophrenia. Had he been ordered to be compliant with a treatment plan after hospitalization, Bertie would not be incarcerated for 9 years at the age of 18. Bertie has been treated at Maryland hospitals such as Sheppard Pratt, University of Maryland, Suburban, and Adventist and many others. He spent most of his high school years in Psychiatric hospitals or residential treatment centers to no avail due to the lack of mandated outpatient treatment.

Bertie had never been in trouble with the law or had as much as a speeding ticket, but due to his unmedicated illness and issues with untreated substance abuse, he is now lost in our criminal justice system. Instead of being treated for his illness and supported to live a productive life, he like millions of others with mental illness, is housed in maximum security prison, without access to proper medical and emotional support of his diagnosis. Heartbroken mothers like me are powerless to do anything.

In March of 2022 I wrote a testimony hopeful for the bill for Assisted Outpatient Treatment to be passed, in order to mandate assisted Outpatient Treatment and try to save my sons life. Had it passed then, my son might have had a chance, and not committed a crime only 4 months later that would change all of our lives forever. A few months after this bill was not passed, He had just been released from his last inpatient hospitalization at the University of Maryland. When I picked him up that bleak January day he told me that he was not planning on filling his prescription or following up with his psychiatrist. He had just turned 18 years old, I realized that I was powerless to help him, without the laws in Maryland changing.

My son Bertie could have been helped had Assisted Outpatient Treatment been available. Maryland is one of only three states that does not offer Assisted Outpatient Treatment.

Please don't let another child fall through the cracks in our broken system. My Grandfather Senator Claiborne Pell (Rhode Island) said, "you don't need to be the loudest voice in the room, but a voice for those with no voice at all". Please be a voice for my son Bertie and the millions of others who are being failed by due to the lack of this program. I implore you to vote for assisted outpatient treatment and save countless children from my child's fate.

Sincerely yours,

Christina Pell Neal