

HB576

From ZD, Bethesda, Montgomery County, MD

Position: **FAVORABLE**

**AOT could have saved my son years of emergency room visits and hospitalizations, homelessness, arrest and trauma.**

My 29-year old son has bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder and personality disorder. He has been ill for approximately 9 years, and has been to the emergency room and hospital many times because he does not adhere to treatment after discharge. Because of the illness itself, he lacks insight into his need for treatment.

In May, 2021 I petitioned for an Emergency Evaluation. He was taken to Suburban Hospital and agreed to voluntary treatment for 6 days and improved. At discharge, he agreed to cooperate in treatment, and signed a treatment contract, but after he was out he refused to go to outpatient treatment or take the prescribed medicine. He does not accept that he has a mental illness. Of course, he deteriorated.

In June we did the hardest thing a parent can do: we put him out of our house. He was angry, and destructive. Then he was homeless in Montgomery County. He had no money to eat and slept in the parks. He came to us very hungry and dehydrated on hot days. The first time he came to us, he looked so bad.

I was afraid to let him come home and I was afraid to leave him out there, homeless and hungry. I was afraid of what would happen to him or what he might do.

Several years before, he was charged with a misdemeanor and agreed to participate in the mental health court which is part of the criminal justice system. He had great respect for the judge that ordered him to take his medicine and adhere to the treatment plan. That was very successful in treating his illness and stabilizing him in the community. He graduated from the program and with continued voluntary treatment was able to get a job in the community and live in a shared home. However, when

Why we must wait for a crime to happen before we help someone who is clearly suffering serious mental illness? If AOT was available, then my son and I wouldn't be going through such a horrible experience after being released from the hospital.

There is no question in my mind that this experience has left a permanent scar on both my son and myself. Please pass the AOT pilot bill as a first step to helping my son, myself and families like ours.