

Testimony for HB 576

Date: February 14, 2024

From: Yolanda, Prince George's County

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Our son had a normal childhood despite having hearing loss and expressive speech delay. He was always an extremely social and kind individual, willing to help anyone in need. He was intellectual, loved to learn new things, took honors classes, participated in clubs (Engineering, STEM), did community service, and was on the honor roll.

From the ages of 11 to 18 years old, he played football for several organizations – Glenarden Boys Football, Flag Football, Charles H. Flowers (JV and Varsity teams). During that time he sustained several *concussions* that were not properly diagnosed and treated. I noticed subtle changes in his behavior and personality but thought it was just growing pains.

During his senior year in high school, he lost interest in attending classes and withdrew from his family and friends. Despite struggling, he did graduate. Afterward he attended college for 1½ years but dropped out because he was unable to concentrate. He then really shut down, shunning the few friends he had left.

After leaving school he tried to work by delivering groceries for Instacart. He lost that job after two car accidents. His illness worsened as he dealt with the job loss and injuries from those accidents. In May 2021 he had an even more serious accident in Delaware and ended up in the trauma ICU with a traumatic brain injury.

Six days after his release from the Delaware hospital we took out an Emergency Petition and he was re-hospitalized in Maryland for a psychiatric evaluation. That is when he was diagnosed with Bi-Polar Disorder and prescribed medication. He did have some awareness that he needed help and signed Maryland's Advanced Directive for Mental Health Treatment. Despite that he has been generally noncompliant with treatment. He cannot stay in our home because he is a danger to us and his siblings. After discharge he refused to go to a shelter and has been homeless and transient since May 2021. In June of 2022 a Virginia police officer executed an Emergency Petition and my son was held 2 days for psychiatric evaluation. He told me he walked to Warrenton, Virginia and then back to Maryland after release.

Last June he was involved in a fight with one of my neighbors. He was arrested and charged with assault. He was held in the Prince George's County Jail pre-trial, was found guilty, and is now serving a 3-year sentence.

We have been unsuccessful in getting our son the help he so desperately needs. Assisted Outpatient Treatment, a program supported by SAMHSA, has proved to reduce homelessness and incarceration in other states. **Maybe it can still help him after he gets out of jail.**

Please give a favorable report to HB576.