

HB0576 testimony

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I used to think medications made people zombies or in some way less of themselves. In my years working in mental health, first as a Mental Health Specialist now as a resident physician training in psychiatry I have come to appreciate how wrong I was.

Medications can allow people to be their true selves, and even more importantly it can allow people to live the lives they want to live and avoid the horrific repercussions of untreated mental illness. Practicing psychiatry in Maryland I have already seen countless instances where people succumb to their untreated illness and face grave outcomes. One patient has been readmitted to the hospital countless times, each time sicker than the last, in the throws of psychosis. One patient now in prison after hearing voices telling them they were in danger and in the midst of that fear, assaulting a stranger. Another patient languishing in jail, awaiting trial for a crime that stemmed from their disorganized behavior. All of whom were untreated.

A crux of this issue is that all of these patients have the symptom anosognosia, a blindness to their illness that is in fact a symptom of that very illness. (also seen in stroke where a person is paralyzed but believes that they can still move their body willingly). Around 50% of patients with serious mental illness have this symptom that means they are completely unaware of their illness, and thus unable to see the need for treatment.

These patients often end up in jail, with repeat hospitalizations, or in the worst cases- dead. Without a means to provide treatment to individuals at the intersection of serious illness, a lack of awareness of this illness and a system that can criminalize this combination, these patients will continue to suffer the grave consequences of their disease- a loss of freedom, rights, and life- taken from them by their illness.

I am writing in support of HB0576, thank you for your time and consideration.