

Testimony for HB576

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From: Kristina Rolfes, 13021 Gent Rd., Reisterstown, MD 21136

**Position: FAVORABLE**

### **AOT CAN SAVE LIVES**

My family is one of many who have loved ones that suffer from severe mental illness and, when in psychosis, are unable to recognize that they have a disorder and need assistance. My family member has been hospitalized numerous times. Due to his illness, he has difficulty maintaining steady employment and making good decisions for himself. During periods of psychosis, he does not believe anything is wrong with him and therefore does not see the need for treatment. During these periods, he suffers from delusions that put him and others in danger. Each time he is hospitalized, he is discharged in 7-10 days with no follow-up care. The hospital's idea of a discharge plan is to provide him with the locations of homeless shelters.

Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) is a much-needed, evidence-based tool that would allow families like mine to help their loved ones. Without it, individuals too often cycle in and out of the hospital, homelessness and jail, and families are unable to intervene to get them treatment. AOT is a tool that could greatly help my family member and so many others like him live a happy and productive life.

We do not let people with other brain illnesses, like dementia, wander the streets, refuse treatment, and slip into homelessness. There is no reason why severe mental illness should be different. We must realize that some people, due to the nature of their illness, are unable to advocate for their own best interests. That leaves us family members to advocate for them. You must take into account the lived experiences of family members who are desperately trying to help their loved ones access treatment but have their hands tied.

When my family member is on medication, he is a hardworking, productive, thoughtful young man. But if he stops taking it, which he has done before, we could very easily lose him to homelessness or death. AOT has been proven to reduce hospitalizations, arrests, homelessness and incarceration. It gives mental health professionals and families another tool to help treat people with serious mental illness in a community-based setting. Studies show that AOT can dramatically improve treatment outcomes and substantially reduce the likelihood of repeat hospitalization and criminal justice involvement. Please listen to family members like mine and find it in your heart to support AOT.

Please give a favorable report on HB576.