

Written Testimony in Opposition to
House Bill 576: Mental Health - Emergency Evaluation
and Involuntary Admission Procedures and Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs

Thank you Chair Pena-Melnyk and Vice-Chair Cullison and committee members for your time.

My name is Mindy Morgan and I am here to state my position in opposition to Senate Bill 576. I am a mother of three, a member of my local church, a taxpayer, a clinical social worker, and the clinical director for a substance use treatment program. I have worked with those with mental health issues for over 20 years.

I am 44 years old and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at age 21. I have been in the hospital for bipolar three times. As I fought for stability during that time, I maintained a full-time job and was the sole provider for my family of five.

I spent decades of my life afraid and ashamed. The people I trusted helped me find my way to treatment. People don't develop the trust to seek help through court orders.

In my third hospital stay I was held against my will. I wanted to leave a dangerous, poorly managed hospital environment and I was not assessed to be a risk, but I was locked in anyhow. As a result, I fear hospitals. Forced treatment was harmful to me.

From a provider's perspective, most people are not engaging with care fully because the treatment systems are broken. Many people cannot afford care because of insurance issues. In some counties there are few or no providers. High quality providers are poorly paid, overburdened with demand and paperwork, and struggling with burnout. Evidence based practices like ACT teams, WRAP providers and peer programs are on long waits because of severe underfunding despite their proven success rates. First Episode Psychosis programs are of great interest right now, yet barely available. Respite programs are rare as well despite how much they help families. Why aren't we funding what works? AOT is not proven to do what we want done yet we are proposing to throw money at it instead?

During testimony last year, it was mentioned by a fellow speaker that in other states, less than 1/4 of petitions filed against individuals were found to be legitimate. If this is the case, at least 750 out of 1,000 individuals would be hauled into court to defend themselves against accusations of being "too ill to care for themselves." All that trauma brought on to those people. All that time and energy put in by our court systems. All wasted. Those who do get into AOT? Where is the evidence showing the extraordinary results making it so worth traumatizing so many and wasting so much?

Please let's stop taking aim at those with mental health issues as though we are the problem. We aren't the issue. Let's instead fund effective programs that already exist... the ones patients cannot access due to availability. ACT teams. Peer programming. WRAP providers. First Episode Psychosis. Respite. Please use our taxpayer dollars on what works. Thank you for your time.

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