



JUDGE ELINORE MARSH STORMER

Summit County Court of Common Pleas

Probate Division
209 S. High Street
Akron, Ohio 44308
330.643.2323

www.summitohioprobate.com

February 6, 2024

Chair Melony Griffith and the members of the Senate Finance Committee:

While every state has different laws, the need for effective treatment for those with a serious mental illness crosses all borders. I am the Probate Court Judge in Summit County, Ohio. In 2016, we started a "New Day Court" to provide assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) to help hundreds of individuals with severe mental illness break the cycle of hospitalizations, homelessness, and criminal justice involvement.

Using "therapeutic jurisprudence", we practice AOT so that it is sympathetic to the individual needs of each client. I remember each one of the AOT cases that have come before me, and we have had remarkable success in Summit County in achieving one of AOT's goals—reducing the need for psychiatric hospitalizations.

In my Court, during 2016-2017, 152 clients participated in my New Day Court and only 14 were re-hospitalized while in the program. The civil court order combined with tailored treatment, was the key to keeping the vast majority of clients out of hospitals, allowing them to receive community-based services instead. They have the opportunity to live their best lives.

I write in support of HB 576 so that the Maryland judiciary can have the same option of AOT as a piece in the toolkit for judges to work with the mental healthcare system and individuals with mental illness to provide more compassionate and effective treatment.

I have trained judges and mental health clinicians from across the country in how best to use their state's AOT enabling legislation to reach desirable outcomes for people with severe mental illness who may lack insight into their illness and symptoms. I have followed their success stories, which, regardless of jurisdiction, produce the desired effect of helping participants engage in meaningful recovery.

In many states with AOT statutes, opponents of the legislation warn that its passing will open flood gates of individuals entering the court system. In fact, most of the clients are already here in our system. A carefully tailored bill like HB 576, combined with judges who are willing to understand and properly utilize AOT, treats only a small number of people who can thrive with a civil court treatment order.

I urge you to pass HB 576 out of committee so that Maryland judges can work with stakeholders to help the people and their communities meet the service needs of those with severe mental illness. Maryland can join the other 47 states using this process.

Please feel free to contact me if you desire additional information.

Judge Elinore Marsh Stormer