

February 11, 2024

Position: Favorable

Bill HB576 - Mental Health – Emergency Evaluation and Involuntary Admission Procedures and Assisted Outpatient Treatment Programs

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“Every life matters.” True?

I am writing in support of the provision of assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) resources for those who need help in living with a serious mental illness because every life does matter.

Though some folks are able to go through life in a seemingly independent way, there are others who thrive with greater support and reinforcements. I have helped to support individuals living with serious mental illness. What I have come to know is that treatment works. Services received (a supportive community, therapy, sharing in groups with peers, medication, alternative therapies, etc.) can vary widely, but what we know is that once an individual is able to experience improvements in their mental health, they have hope and are often more willing to embrace mental health care in the community.

I support HB576 to establish a strong, evidenced-based assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) program to ensure the best possible health outcomes for those living with a serious mental illness and the communities that are connected to these individuals. It's clear that in order to improve and save lives, we as a caring community need to be able to act when dangerous behavior often involving repeat hospitalizations, the criminal justice system, etc. leads to self-harm, and even death.

With declines in health for many in our post-COVID19 pandemic world, we must act now. Yes, the prospect of ever having to require someone to comply with a court ordered medical treatment plan in the community is serious, and fortunately it's a very rare situation. If 47 other states have enacted laws to authorize AOT programs, surely Marylanders can promote the development of a strong and balanced program to help those living with serious mental illness to live their best lives.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request for a favorable report to HB576.