



MDDCSAM is the Maryland state chapter of the American Society of Addiction Medicine whose members are physicians and other health providers who treat people with substance use disorders.

HB 833 Children in Need of Assistance - Parents in Substance Use Disorder Treatment

FAVORABLE

House Judiciary Committee Feb 15th, 2024.

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the committee:

Keeping parents and their children together whenever possible, and avoiding unnecessary family separation is critical for the mental health of parent and child. As any parent can understand, having a child removed is highly traumatic and tends worsen depressed mood (prevalent in this population), undermine substance use treatment and interfere with recovery.

It is highly traumatizing for the child as well and may increase the risk of mental health disorders down the road.

Separating parent and child may certainly be necessary if abuse or neglect is present, which can occur in people with SUD, as well as others. **However, the fact that a person is in treatment for substance use disorder (SUD), per se, should never lead to such assumptions or actions.**

Since this principle is well known among addiction treatment personnel, one may wonder why a bill like HB 833 is necessary. It is necessary because separations are still occurring due to a tremendous level of stigma, misunderstanding, and assumptions made about people with SUD, and a wide variation in knowledge and attitudes among Social Services case workers & others.

As an addiction medicine physician, I have had patients in treatment for opioid use disorder who had their young children inappropriately and unnecessarily removed from the family because of such assumptions. Thankfully, these decisions were reversed after considerable efforts.

Neither inpatient nor outpatient SUD treatment programs feel the need to routinely report all of their clients with young children to Social Services or Child Protective Services unless there were some reason to do so. This would be, at a minimum, a violation professional standards.

A 2018 literature review (Straussner, et. al., below) found that children of families with parental substance use disorders (SUDs) did better in terms of their behavior and bonding when there were family interventions. Such interventions are valuable in decreasing the intergenerational transmission of trauma and SUDs.

We urge a favorable report.

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Straussner, S.L.A., & Fewell, C. H. (2018). A review of recent literature on the impact of parental substance use disorders on children and the provision of effective services. Current Opinions in Psychiatry, 31:363-367