

Greetings, members of the Senate Finance committee,

My name is Diane Shields. I am a NAMI Maryland/Harford County member and Family to Family Facilitator of 5 years that teaches 8-week course to those who care for loved ones diagnosed with mental illness. I have several family members and friends who have various mental illness diagnoses such as debilitating Anxiety, Depression, Bipolar Disorder, and Schizophrenia. Most importantly, I am an advocate and an advocate that educates everyone I can in this area regarding the need for the creation of new initiatives, and the need for more research and aid in this area.

These illnesses can no longer be the lowest priority of our government and elected officials! When will we realize the cost of ignoring this part of society? The financial cost alone to Medicare, State Medical Assistance, Insurance Cost, Courts, Jails, Juvenile Services, Welfare, Homelessness, Loss of life from Suicide/ Homicide and Security. Government programs only place a band aid on the symptoms of the illness. The burden of this is passed on to law enforcement, hospitals and family members. Quite frankly, we have had enough of being ignored and dealing with financial cuts in funding even to the most basic of programs.

From my first exposure to now in 2025, I continue to struggle with navigating the mental health systems. While we have made some great strides in the last 30 years, we are still very much in the dark ages. True Parity continues to be a problem. Insurance companies continue to find ways to circumvent the law. Countless hours, days, weeks, months and sometimes years are spent trying to get a loved one the help that they need. The financial and emotional cost to not only the patient but to the entire family is astronomical. New medicines are denied until the patient fails two other types and or the cost of the new ones are out of reach. Thus, the reason behind and the need for SB111 and HB 382 to pass. I continue to advocate and fight the hospitals, doctors, lawmakers, criminal justice system and insurance companies for those afflicted with these diseases.

Respectfully,

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