



Sheppard Pratt

Oral Testimony – Carrie Etheridge

House Bill 962 – Public Health – Pediatric Hospital Overstay Patients

House Health and Government Operations Committee

February 26, 2025

Madame Chair, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the House HGO Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this critical bill. I also thank the Chair for recognizing its importance. My name is Carrie Etheridge, and I am the Director of Social Work at Sheppard Pratt. I am here to share my firsthand experience in hospital, inpatient psychiatric, and residential treatment center (RTC) processes to highlight the challenges our pediatric patients and care providers face daily.

Impact and Dangers of Children Staying in Hospital Beds Longer Than Necessary:

- Emotional and psychological harm: Extended hospital stays without appropriate therapeutic care exacerbate anxiety, depression, and behavioral deterioration.
- Developmental setbacks: Children miss critical educational and social development opportunities when confined to a hospital setting.
- Trauma exposure: Being hospitalized for extended periods can be retraumatizing, leading to worsening mental health conditions.
- Increased aggression and crisis incidents: Many children decompensate in hospital environments, leading to escalated behaviors requiring more intensive interventions.

Diversion of Resources & Impact on Hospital Operations:

- Hospital beds are blocked: Overstay patients occupy beds that could serve other children in psychiatric crises.
- Strain on emergency departments: Hospitals must hold children in emergency rooms while inpatient beds remain full, delaying care for new admissions.
- Increased staffing burden: Extended stays require hospital staff to provide long-term care without the specialized resources needed for rehabilitation.
- Financial and operational strain: Hospitals must allocate resources for non-acute care rather than crisis stabilization, impacting overall efficiency.

Sheppard Pratt fully supports efforts to address pediatric hospital overstay challenges and enhance care coordination. Ensuring a robust continuum of care benefits not just overstay patients but the entire behavioral health system.

For these reasons, Sheppard Pratt urges a **favorable report on HB962**.