

Template for Written Testimony in Support of Maryland HB497

House Judiciary Committee

100 Taylor House Office Building
101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

February 11th, 2025

Bill Number: HB497

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Dr. Will Dobud and I am a Maryland resident, social worker, and researcher focused on youth experiences in receiving mental and behavioral health care. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 497 – The Preventing Abduction in Youth Transport Act. This bill will regulate youth transport companies to ensure children are not subjected to harmful and coercive practices when being transported to residential facilities.

Currently, youth transport companies operate with little to no oversight, leading to distressing and traumatizing experiences for vulnerable children. I have researched the impacts of transport services. Many youth are taken in the middle of the night, forcibly removed from their homes, handcuffed, blindfolded, or physically restrained in ways that are more akin to abduction than a legitimate intervention. These practices can cause lasting psychological harm.

HB 497 would:

- Prohibit transport companies from using **blindfolds, hoods, and unnecessary restraints**.
- Ban nighttime pickups **between 9 PM - 6 AM** to prevent distressing removals.
- Require that any use of restraints be **justified and applied only by trained staff** in extreme cases.
- Hold transport companies accountable through enforcement measures.

For more than a decade, I have focused my research efforts on harmful wilderness therapy programs and the longstanding impacts of transport services. I have interviewed dozens of youth harmed by transport services and see how the involuntary seclusion and restraint is antithetical effective mental and behavioral health care. I have provided references to my work on secure transport below.

HB 497 is a necessary step to ensure that children are transported in a way that prioritizes their safety, dignity, and well-being. Maryland has a responsibility to ensure that vulnerable youth are not subjected to state-sanctioned trauma. I urge the committee to pass this bill and take action against harmful transport practices.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Will Dobud
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Chevy Chase, MD 20815
301-943-0314

References

Magnuson, D., Dobud, W., & Harper, N. J. (2024). Can involuntary youth transport into outdoor behavioral healthcare treatment programs (wilderness therapy) ever be ethical?. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 41(3), 417-425.

Dobud, W. W. (2022). Experiences of secure transport in outdoor behavioral healthcare: A narrative inquiry. *Qualitative Social Work*, 21(4), 697-713.

Pringle, G., Dobud, W. W., & Harper, N. J. (2021). The next frontier: Wilderness therapy and the treatment of complex trauma. In *Nature and health* (pp. 191-207). Routledge.

Harper, N. J., Magnuson, D., & Dobud, W. W. (2021). A closer look at involuntary treatment and the use of transport service in outdoor behavioral healthcare (wilderness therapy). *Child & Youth Services*, 42(2), 200-219.