

Written Testimony in Support of SB 707 and HB 1014

Date: February 19, 2026

Submitted by: Andrea Warren Speaks & Douglas Speaks, Sr.

Position: Support

Chair and Members of the Committee:

We are writing in strong support of SB 707 and HB 1014. We are Maryland residents and parents of an adult son living with severe mental illness. Our family has experienced firsthand the devastating gap in our current law — a gap that delays treatment until a situation becomes dangerous or tragic.

Our son, who is a college graduate with a degree in computer science began experiencing symptoms of severe mental illness in 2020 during the COVID-19 Pandemic when he had to finish his senior year remotely. As his condition progressed, he lost awareness of his illness and continues to refuse treatment. His judgment and reasoning has deteriorated significantly. He became unable to make rational, informed decisions about his care, even as his condition has worsened. He has not worked since 2020 and is unable to care for himself.

As his parents, we have done everything we know that is possible to support our son, but still the law is not on our family's side. We have participated in support groups with the National Alliance for Mental Health (NAMI) of Montgomery County, called the Montgomery County Crisis Center to respond to crises at our home, called the Montgomery County Police over 27 times to our home for acts of violence and aggression, contacted the Montgomery County Council for resources, consulted with Maryland Legal Aid, and have petitioned the court several times for an emergency evaluation.

Our son has been hospitalized several times at Pratt Hospital, Holy Cross Hospital, and Sibley Hospital, only to be repeatedly discharged because of his refusal for treatment. His most serious hospitalization was due to a suicide attempt where he spent several days in ICU at Holy Cross Hospital.

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Currently, we have a guardianship case that is stalled in court due to hospital physicians' unwillingness to complete the physician certificate required for a guardianship case. Recently, we learned of the passing of HB 0576 - Maryland

Assisted Outpatient Treatment and have filed a petition for this treatment for our son. However, we have been told by the court that we have to wait until July 1, 2026. In addition, people in authority seemed to know very little about this new law which leaves citizens like myself lacking knowledge how to proceed.

Under current Maryland law, intervention has been nearly impossible unless there was imminent danger. Yet anyone who has lived through this knows that deterioration does not always look like an immediate act of violence. Instead, it can look like:

- Gradual loss of self-care
- Inability to maintain employment
- Severe decline in reasoning and judgment
- Paranoia and distorted thinking
- Refusal of necessary medical treatment

By the time the legal threshold for intervention is met, families are often facing crisis, homelessness, incarceration, or irreversible harm.

SB 707 and HB 1014 offer a compassionate and practical solution. These bills recognize that:

- "Danger to self or others" may be a substantial risk — not only imminent harm.
- A person's medical and personal history should be considered.
- Inability to provide for basic needs is a form of danger.
- Significant deterioration in judgment and reasoning can prevent someone from making informed decisions about life-saving treatment.

These clarifications do not criminalize mental illness. They prevent tragedy.

Families like mine are forced to watch our loved ones decline, knowing they need treatment but lacking the legal ability to help. We are told to "wait until

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something happens.” That is not a compassionate policy. That is reactive policy.

Treatment before tragedy is not punishment — it is protection.

Our son is not a statistic. He is a human being with dignity, intelligence, and potential. But severe mental illness can rob individuals of insight into their own condition. When that happens, families and clinicians need tools to intervene before harm occurs.

These bills strike a careful balance between civil liberties and public safety. They acknowledge that untreated severe mental illness can impair judgment so profoundly that an individual cannot act in their own best interest.

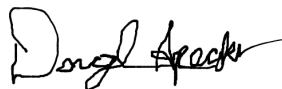
We urge this committee to support SB 707 and HB 1014 so that families like mine do not have to wait for irreversible harm before help becomes available.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,



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