

Written Testimony: SB 550

BILL: SB 550 – Health Care Decisions Act – Surrogate Decision Making – Mental Disorders

IDENTIFY AS: The H.E.R. Parity Act (Health – Equity – Representation)

COMMITTEE: Senate Finance Committee

HEARING DATE: February 24, 2026

POSITION: SUPPORT (FAV)

NAME: April Worsley

TO: Chair Beidle and members of the Senate Finance Committee

Testimony:

I am writing today as a witness to a systemic failure. As a close friend to a mother who has spent years navigating the intersection of the healthcare and criminal justice systems for her child, I have seen firsthand how the current law serves as a barrier rather than a bridge to safety. I am here to urge a FAVORABLE report on SB 550 (The H.E.R. Parity Act).

I have watched a devoted parent exhaust every legal and personal resource to protect a child who lives with multiple disabilities and a mental health disorder. Despite having an Advanced Health Directive and Power of Attorney in place, this family has been repeatedly blocked from authorizing essential mental health treatment.

As a friend standing on the sidelines, the absurdity of the current system is clear:

- **The Revolving Door:** I have seen a cycle where a child is discharged into unsafe conditions because the law barred the mother from acting as a surrogate. These are parents who are legally forbidden from helping until the situation escalates into a police matter.
- **The Toll of Procedural Negligence:** I have witnessed administrative chaos and facilities not considering all information relevant for treatment planning. There are consistent communication breakdowns regarding insurance and care coordination that a surrogate could have resolved in minutes if the law allowed them to be heard.
- **The Criminalization of Health:** When we block a surrogate from authorizing stabilization for a mental disorder, we aren't protecting autonomy. We are ensuring the crisis continues until it lands in the criminal justice system. This transition from a medical

crisis to a legal one is a tragedy for the family and a massive, preventable financial burden on our state.

A Waste of Taxpayer Dollars

As a resident and taxpayer, it is frustrating to watch public funds poured into repeated emergency room visits, improper discharges, and the subsequent costs of the legal system—all because we refuse to recognize a surrogate's voice for mental health in the same way we do for physical health.

Guardianship is an overly restrictive solution for a temporary crisis of capacity. SB 550 provides a more precise tool: it honors the patient's documented wishes through an empowered surrogate.

Families are fighting to be the safety net their loved ones deserve. The current law is the only thing cutting that net. I respectfully urge you to support SB 550 to ensure that representation and equity finally extend to those in our mental health community.

Sincerely,

April Worlsey

5705 Deer Pond Lane

Camp Springs, MD 20746