

Testimony for SB 707

February 24, 2026; Senate Finance Committee

From: Kathleen Smith - Waldorf, Charles County

Position: Support

My name is Kathleen Smith, and I am a resident of Charles County. I am the mother of an adult son who has severe mental illness and also developmental disabilities, including a form of autism. **Because the current standard for dangerousness is not defined to clarify that danger need not be imminent, my son did not receive the treatment he desperately needed and received a 20-year prison sentence.**

Paul had no insight that he had a severe mental illness. I paid for his apartment since he could not provide food or shelter for himself. His growing inability to control his actions, suicidal tendencies and destructive behaviors toward himself, his family and society was what led us to look for assistance through the Maryland Emergency Evaluation Petition System and Involuntary Hospital Admission process.

The current laws did not work in 2007, when my 21-year-old son left me a message on my cell phone in the middle of the night. He stated that he was standing in the middle of Crain Highway with his eyes closed, hoping a passing car would hit him. When I woke the next morning and listened to the message, I immediately called 911. Charles County Sheriffs listened to my message and told me they would do a welfare check on him. They located him at his apartment and told me that he stated he was fine. The sheriffs decided that since he was no longer in the roadway that they could not initiate an emergency petition. Clearly with Paul's history and the distraught suicidal phone message, the law should allow an emergency petition to be completed. He was also unable to care for himself, attempted to harm to himself and was rapidly deteriorating mentally. However, with how the current law is written and is interpreted as requiring imminent danger, I and the police officers were unable to obtain an emergency evaluation.

About one week after the emergency evaluation was denied, Paul voluntarily left the apartment, became homeless, and began entering other residences at night while they were occupied.

He is currently serving a 20-year prison sentence with 60 years suspended. If the provisions of this Bill had been in effect, I believe this could have been prevented.

Treatment delayed is treatment denied. The consequences of no treatment are homelessness and criminalization. Please support SB 707 so others with serious mental illness can receive timely evaluations and hospital treatment before they deteriorate and suffer the terrible outcomes of denied treatment.

Last year while not on medication the police were called to our house several times and did nothing because he didn't actively show imminent danger while they were present. A few weeks after - he decided to walk on the main road and darted across the road. He was struck by a car, sustaining life threatening injuries and was on life support for over ten days.