



# Sheppard Pratt

## Written Testimony

### House Bill 1014 – Mental Health Law – Danger to the Life or Safety of the Individual or of Others – Definition (Right to Treatment)

#### House Health Committee

February 24, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 1014, which updates and clarifies the statutory definition of “danger to the life or safety of the individual or of others” for purposes of emergency evaluations and involuntary admissions under Maryland mental health law.

As the nation’s largest private, nonprofit behavioral health provider, and a statewide safety-net system serving more than 80,000 people annually, Sheppard Pratt supports HB 1014 because it strengthens patient safety, improves clinical decision-making, and ensures individuals experiencing serious psychiatric crises can access timely, appropriate treatment.

#### **HB 1014 Modernizes Maryland’s Outdated Standard**

Current Maryland law relies heavily on an “imminent danger” threshold that is clinically outdated and often unworkable in real-world emergencies.

HB 1014 replaces that narrow standard with a more clinically accurate framework that evaluates:

- Substantial risk, whether or not imminent;
- The individual’s current condition; and
- Available medical, psychiatric, and personal history.

This updates Maryland law to reflect contemporary evidence-based psychiatric practice and aligns with the approach used by many other states.

#### **Provides Clear, Objective Criteria for Clinicians & Law Enforcement**

HB 1014 enumerates specific indicators of danger, including when a person:

- Is at substantial risk of harming themselves or others;
- Is engaging in behavior likely to result in criminal justice involvement directly related to their mental disorder;
- Cannot meet basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, self-protection, or safety, creating a substantial risk of serious harm or death; or
- Is experiencing a significant deterioration in judgment or behavioral control that is likely to result in one of the above outcomes.

These criteria help clinicians make consistent, defensible, trauma-informed, and safety-oriented decisions, reducing unnecessary subjectivity and improving statewide uniformity.

### **Reduces Emergency Department Boarding & Preventable Crises**

Maryland's overly narrow "imminence" standard often results in:

- Delayed treatment;
- Emergency room overcrowding and prolonged psychiatric boarding;
- Increased risk of self-harm, exploitation, or victimization; and
- Increased likelihood of police involvement or incarceration.

Clarifying the standard helps ensure individuals receive treatment, not criminalization, when their symptoms escalate.

### **Promotes Early, Stabilizing Intervention**

Psychiatric crises often escalate rapidly. Early identification of substantial risk:

- Prevents tragedy;
- Reduces involuntary inpatient admissions by intervening earlier;
- Supports the health-care system's ability to manage caseloads; and
- Improves outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

HB 1014 is particularly vital given Maryland's ongoing pediatric and adult behavioral health boarding crises and the growing intensity of psychiatric emergencies statewide.

**For these reasons, Sheppard Pratt respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 1014.**

Thank you for your consideration.