

Testimony for HB1014

February 24, 2026; Senate Finance Committee

From: Hawa Fofanah, PMHNP-BC, FNP-BC

Position: Support

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are waiting too long to help people with severe mental illness—until they are suicidal, violent, homeless, or incarcerated—because our current danger standard for involuntary treatment is too narrow.

I grew up in Sierra Leone (West Africa) where mental health services are extremely limited. I lost my cousin to severe mental illness, a loss that profoundly shaped my professional path. After more than 8 years practicing as a Family Nurse Practitioner in the United States, I added mental health to my license in 2021 to better serve this vulnerable population.

Despite practicing in a country with advanced health care systems, I continue to encounter the same painful barrier: the inability to obtain timely hospitalization for patients who clearly lack insight into their illness. Working closely with psychiatrist Dr. David Pickar, I have cared for individuals with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and other serious mental illnesses who are unable to recognize their need for treatment. Their judgment and reasoning deteriorate. They may be unable to care for themselves, maintain safety, or make rational medical decisions. Yet, if they are not explicitly suicidal or homicidal, or if the danger is not considered imminent, involuntary evaluations are frequently denied.

The consequences are devastating. Patients decline further, lose housing and employment, and cycle through emergency rooms and jails. Families are left helpless, watching their loved ones deteriorate while being told they do not meet the legal threshold for intervention. By the time the standard is met, the illness is more entrenched and recovery more difficult.

HB1014 would allow earlier intervention based on clinical reality rather than waiting for imminent catastrophe. It would help prevent homelessness, incarceration, victimization, and long-term deterioration caused by untreated severe mental illness.

I respectfully ask the Committee to support HB1014 and take an important step toward compassionate, timely mental health care.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Hawa Fofanah, PMHNP-BC, FNP-BC