

SB 707

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Montgomery County

Position: Favorable

I have now lost both my adult children to the short-sighted and illogical policies plaguing mental health in our country. While Maryland is one of the few states working to provide a more humane mental health system, more work needs to be done.

For more than 10 years, the danger standard delayed treatment for my SMI daughter. She was a resident of Montgomery County until her death this past February 22 from a pulmonary embolism while in a Maryland psychiatric unit at the age of 39.

As her legal guardian, I can attest to the multiple times she needed immediate psychiatric hospitalization, and yet emergency rooms that were familiar with her condition rejected admission because she was not considered a danger to herself or others. However, it was obvious she was clearly spiraling to get to that point.

It got to the point that employees at Montgomery County's Crisis Team were helping me navigate the system so she would get the needed treatment. I often said to Crisis Team workers that everyone in this mental health system is getting paid while many of the people they are supposed to help are falling through the cracks. They didn't deny my point. But it wasn't in their job description to make policy change.

I began my career as a reporter and documented mental health policies and the need for not just changes, but also a crescendo of caring for people who have mental health conditions by no fault of their own.

You have the power to take an incremental step in the right direction of caring.

SB 707 strengthens the ability of providers and families to intervene earlier and more effectively, helping prevent crises and protect individuals with severe mental illness (SMI) and their communities.

This bill ensures "danger" standard for emergency evaluation and involuntary hospitalization covers situations where a person with SMI faces a substantial risk of:

Causing bodily harm to themselves or others.

Being unable to provide for basic needs including food, clothing, or shelter, medical care, self-protection, or safety, to a degree that risks serious harm, illness, or death.

Thank you for your consideration. I urge passage of the bill as amended in the Senate, without changes.

Lisa Bass Cooper