

Testimony for Bill number HB1014: Mental Health Law – Danger to the Life or Safety of the Individual or of Others – Definition (Right to Treatment)

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Position: SUPPORT

In February of 2024, my son's hands were so raw and inflamed they were cracked and bleeding. He had been washing his hands non stop and then pouring rubbing alcohol on them because he thought they were infected. He told us, as his parents, that we were not ourselves and had been replaced by others. He thought his computer and phone were hacked and people were spying on him. He thought the neighbors had cameras set up in his room. He threw away perfectly good food because he thought it was contaminated. He would barge into his younger brother's room and accuse him of stealing or wiping feces on his items around the house causing him to constantly keep his door locked. He repeatedly told us of his desire to have a gun in the house for safety. He would burn items in his room causing the room to fill with smoke. He was convinced his closet had a mold infestation so the contents were piled in the middle of the room. He thought if multi-vitamin gummies were good for you, that eating a whole bottle was even better. He was verbally aggressive, antagonistic, rude, and extremely stubborn.

Just three months earlier, he chose to go off of his medications for schizophrenia and quickly deteriorated to a condition of psychosis with paranoia and unsafe behavior. We pleaded with him to go back on his medication; but the longer he was off of them, the more he didn't trust us, his team, or the meds. Though he had not overtly threatened our lives or his own, we did not feel safe around him, knew he was not making safe choices, and we worried what he might be capable of if the situation worsened.

The Baltimore County Crisis Unit would not come to the house unless he gave his permission—which he wouldn't give. His care team at Johns Hopkins told us their hands were tied and could not help us unless he was willing to help himself. Finally, I was forced to go to the District Court of Maryland for Baltimore County for an emergency to get him there involuntarily. This was a traumatic experience for me as his mother, and for our family who knew what was happening. For my son who was escorted from our home by Baltimore County police, the experience was both traumatic and undoubtedly reinforced his belief that he could not trust his family. The emergency petition led to 2 inpatient stays—the first was involuntary for 3 weeks which allowed enough healing to happen, which led to a voluntary second one for 6 weeks a short time later.

Though we managed to get him stable again, he certainly was not thriving in an outpatient

setting so in November of 2024, my son entered a long-term residential psychiatric rehab facility. One of the questions they asked me was “How will we know if he is starting to become unwell? What are the signs that you would recognize?”

For me to explain to them how I would know he was unwell, I needed to explain how he is when he is well. My son is a kind, polite, and empathic soul. He cares deeply for his family, other people, and animals, especially our pets. He rarely angers or raises his voice even when frustrated. And if he ever does, he is super quick to apologize and make amends. It genuinely bothers him if he felt he hurt someone’s feelings in any way. He is a people pleaser at heart. We have always had a good, loving relationship based on trust. Trust that we will always love and support him, and he trusts us, as his parents and caregivers, to help guide him through this terrible mental illness journey.

So when they asked me ‘how will we know?’ I simply said, “If he ever starts being the slightest bit rude to you, that’s when you need to pay close attention.” Because my son is not that paranoid, untrusting, and antagonistic person I described above. That is his illness. We knew he was not well and the longer he stayed that way, the greater the risk for harm to himself or others.

Families know when their loved ones aren’t well. It is hard enough to navigate this arguably broken mental health system, but the current standard makes it nearly impossible to get help to our loved ones who need it the most and, due to their illness, can not advocate for themselves.

I kindly ask this committee to support this bill and in turn the families and their loved ones.