

Testimony in Support of HB-279

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Oludolapo Kale, and I am a Board-Certified Psychiatrist. I have worked in correctional psychiatry for more than twenty-five years, first in Pennsylvania and now in Maryland. I currently serve as the Statewide Director of Psychiatry for Centurion Health.

I am here today on behalf of Maryland DPSCS and Centurion Health to express strong and unequivocal support for HB-279, legislation establishing a Medication Review Committee within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. This committee would determine—under clearly defined circumstances—whether psychotropic medication should be administered to an incarcerated individual.

First, medication review panels are the standard of care across the United States. In every community-based setting, individuals with serious mental illness are entitled to due process, independent clinical review, and procedural safeguards when decisions about psychotropic medication are made.

Yet in Maryland, incarcerated individuals with serious mental illness do not have access to this same standard of care. As a result, they receive a lower level of medical treatment solely because they are incarcerated. This disparity is morally unacceptable and raises serious concerns under the Eighth Amendment, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Rehabilitation Act.

Second, untreated serious mental illnesses—such as schizophrenia—carry a significant risk of progressive brain damage and long-term cognitive decline. This is well-documented clinical reality. HB-279 creates a mechanism for independent, external review to determine whether psychotropic medication may be clinically appropriate for individuals who are otherwise at risk of irreversible neurological harm.

Finally, I offer a simple question: If you were unable to make rational decisions because of a severe mental illness, would you want to be left to languish in a psychotic state—experiencing preventable brain damage and cognitive decline? Or would you want access to an independent, medically informed committee empowered to review your case and identify treatment options that could preserve your health, dignity, and future?

HB-279 does not eliminate anyone's rights. It does not mandate forced medication. It adds oversight, accountability, and humanity to a system that urgently needs all three.

For these reasons, I respectfully and strongly urge a favorable report on HB-279.

Thank you.

Oludolapo Kale, M.D.