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Legislative District 26
Prince George's County

Judiciary Committee
Criminal Subcommittee
Chair, Juvenile Subcommittee
Public Safety Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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

Good afternoon, Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and esteemed members of the Health Committee.

My name is Delegate Jamila Woods, and I am here today to request a favorable report on House Bill 1014, legislation that clarifies the definition of “danger to the life or safety of the individual or of others” under Maryland’s mental health law.

This bill addresses a critical gap in our statutory framework governing emergency evaluations and involuntary admissions. Under current law, clinicians, judges, and law enforcement are required to determine whether an individual poses a danger to themselves or others, yet the statute does not provide a clear, comprehensive definition of what that standard means. As a result, decisions that profoundly affect liberty, safety, and treatment access are often made without sufficient statutory guidance.

House Bill 1014 provides clarity while preserving due process. The bill defines “danger to the life or safety of the individual or of others” as a substantial risk, whether or not the risk is imminent, based on the individual’s current condition and, when available, their personal, medical, and psychiatric history. It then outlines specific criteria to guide that assessment.

First, the definition includes situations in which, as a result of a mental disorder, the individual is likely to cause bodily harm to themselves or another person. Second, it recognizes the reality that untreated mental illness can result in conduct that leads to criminal justice involvement, which is often a failure of access to timely treatment rather than a public safety solution. Third, it addresses grave disability by recognizing when an individual, not due to indigence, is unable to provide for basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or self-protection to such a degree that there is a substantial risk of serious bodily harm, illness, or death. Finally, it acknowledges substantial deterioration in judgment, reasoning, or behavioral control, when the individual is currently substantially impaired in their ability to make a rational and informed decision about treatment and is likely to meet one of the other enumerated criteria.

This is not about expanding involuntary commitment indiscriminately. It is about creating a clearer, more clinically informed standard that reflects the realities faced by families, providers, and first responders. Too often, individuals deteriorate in plain sight, cycling through emergency rooms or the criminal justice system because the threshold for intervention is unclear or interpreted too

narrowly. By defining the standard in statute, HB1014 promotes consistency in application, protects civil liberties through structured criteria, and strengthens the link between mental health law and access to appropriate treatment.

At its core, this legislation affirms that the right to treatment and the protection of life and safety must be grounded in clarity, fairness, and clinical judgment. It provides decision-makers with guidance while maintaining important safeguards.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1014.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jamila J. Woods". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Delegate Jamila J. Woods
Maryland House of Delegates
District 26 – Prince George’s County