

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL #HB1476

### Independent Oversight and Review Board for Health Care of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities-Establishment

**Date:** 02/27/2020

**From:** Deborah Fling

**To:** Chairman Luke Clippinger, Madame Chair Vanessa Atterbeary and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

**Re:** SUPPORT FOR BILL#HB1476

Dear Chairman and members of the House, I am asking that you vote for this Bill to pass because it seriously impacts the physical and mental health of our incarcerated population and loved ones whose health and well being are not only at risk but there are those who have lost their lives or have become impaired in many ways due to the lack of treatment or proper treatment.

I have two sons who have a family history of addiction and mental illness and due to their substance use they have both been incarcerated in the MD Prison system.

I have had to advocate for their health care on several occasions as well as helping other family members who are at their wits end with nowhere to turn.

One situation (and there are a few) is that my son hurt his wrist and asked for an appointment however, it was up to the Correctional Officer in charge as to whether or not the request be submitted. Once several slips were sent up, he was seen and told he was fine with no issues however, the swelling continued there was a knot that formed, and his wrist began popping and was continuously hurting. An x-ray was ordered and when he went back for his results, he was told that there was an old injury and he would need to give it time. He then contacted me to ask if I ever recalled any injury to his wrist or hand, I did not. He told them this and requested help again and contacted me so after multiple attempts, I was able to speak with a staff member in medical and was told the same. I insisted they do an MRI, but that was denied, and a new x-ray was done. When those results were returned, he was 2 months into his injured wrist and the new x-ray showed neither a new one or an old injury. When I contacted them again he had been moved to a different facility and although it was the same nursing staff, I was told they couldn't speak with me because there wasn't a release form signed by my son in his file and while they had one previously it had now mysteriously disappeared and more time would be wasted in order to get a new form signed. Once all of this was handled, I was told by a nurse that the only explanation they had for the discrepancies was that the equipment is so old, it's not reliable! An MRI is too expensive and there wouldn't be one. Another time is when one of my sons had chest pain. He yelled for help and begged for help. It is up to a unit leader to decide to walk them to medical or not and the first time it was decided not to do so. Why would a Correctional Officer with no certification get to make a decision when someone has chest pain that it is or isn't real?

Incarcerations for the majority are due to their addiction issues and they simply are not receiving mental health treatment to get to the heart of why they continue to use and due to the conditions

they want to remain numb so they don't have to feel the heartache and loss so the vicious cycle of repeating itself and the revolving doors to recidivism remain.

I believe we can do better and certainly need to hold the professionals hired to do these jobs accountable. When an incarcerated individual is denied health care, dental, vision or mental healthcare it only exacerbates the situation and upon release they've not only suffered throughout but many times it's irreversible damages and then the community at large is exposed as well. It's a never-ending cycle when being treated properly and on time could solve a multitude of these issues and its oftentimes ridiculously inhumane treatment according to standards in the US. Please pass this Bill so these changes can be made.

Respectfully,

Deborah Fling, Washington County