

## Testimony for SB480

Senate Finance Committee

February 28, 2023

Position: FAVORABLE

**I am Dhyana Parker, on August 14, 1994 I lost my little brother to Suicide.** During that time the stigma in the black community on mental illness and suicide was something we never discussed. Unfortunately, in our community we were raised with the understanding that Suicide was a White person's disease. After my brother's death, I went into a deep depression. I was afraid to get the necessary help that I needed because of the stigma and the thought of losing my job. The stigma against Mental Illness and Suicide need to change and I feel that AOT will help rid us of that stigma and allow people to get the help that they need and not have to worry about negative repercussions.

In the last 3 years, I've had several family members fighting the system because of their Mental status. Some lost their homes and jobs and it stems from the fact that the voluntary only resources available are not helping our society. The fact that Maryland is one of the states that has not supported the AOT program, is unacceptable. It seems that you don't care about your Maryland residents. It's allowing that stigma against Mental Illness to remain.

In the last few days, I've met a daughter whose mom is dealing with Suicidal Ideation, and I received a message from a father who's daughter is dealing with Suicidal Ideations as well. The AOT program can give these families some sort of hope that people really do care about them and their wellbeing. Our system is broken when dealing with Mental Illness. It's easier to get a stadium built than it is for us to get the necessary support for Mental Illness. I will continue to fight in honor of my brother who's no longer here and for those that are still here and fighting everyday just to get out of bed. I will be their voice. It's sad that we have to come here today to fight for something that's affects us all in some form.

Please give a favorable report to SB480 and help prevent suicide.

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