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Testimony for SB 154 Mental Health Advance Directives

Honorable Senators:

Thank you for sponsoring Senate Bill 154 on Mental Health Advance Directives. Mental health issues are quite scary for the person experiencing the issue and for their family and friends. Stigma, handcuffs, and lack of resources add additional trauma. Many mental health issues are temporary and cyclical – just like physical health issues. This is why a psychiatric or mental health advance directive is such an important legal tool. It allows a person with mental illness to state their preferences for treatment in advance of a crisis. It also protects a person's autonomy and supports their ability to direct their care.

Psychiatric advance directives are similar to living wills and other medical advance planning documents. They support appropriate care and prevent involuntary and inappropriate treatment. They also provide a framework for open conversations with family members and medical professionals. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, people who complete psychiatric advance directives are more likely to work collaboratively with their clinicians, experience fewer coercive crisis interventions, and feel that their personal needs for mental health services are being met. Many mental health groups support mental health advance directives – including SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), National Alliance on Mental Illness, and Mental Health America. Maryland's Behavioral Health Administration even has a sample psychiatric advance directive on their website.

However, psychiatric advance directives can't work if people don't know they exist! In our family's mental health journey, we have had contact with many mental health professionals, facilities, and families. We can attest to the fact that the medical profession and clients don't know about these advance directives. SB 154 addresses this issue by publicizing psychiatric advance directives and encouraging their use. I urge you to pass this bill so that all individuals and families can have access to the most supportive, least traumatic mental health care possible. Thank you.

References:

https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/a_practical_guide_to_psychiatric_advance_directives.pdf

<https://www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities/Responding-to-Crises/Psychiatric-Advance-Directives>

<https://nrc-pad.org/states/maryland-resources/>