

Testimony for SB480 – Mental Hygiene Law – Assisted Outpatient Treatment

Senate Finance Committee

Date: February 28, 2023, 1:00 pm

From: Susan Kneller, Rockville, MD, Montgomery County

Position: SUPPORT

I am Susan Kneller, the parent of a 51-year-old son diagnosed with Schizophrenia and a NAMI Montgomery County Helpline Representative for the past 22 years. The function of the Helpline is to try to put callers in touch with resources that will help them.

Many callers tell us their relatives have been hospitalized repeatedly but refuse to follow any recommended outpatient treatment, resulting in the cycle starting all over again. These callers live in hell dealing with what is often horribly bizarre behaviors that cause dysfunction to whole families. We cannot offer them any solution since Maryland does not have an Assisted Outpatient Treatment law.

There are some opponents to AOT who say that if people are engaged appropriately, they will accept treatment and services. My experience is that it is impossible to voluntarily engage people who have untreated horrifically distorted psychotic thinking. My son lost his beloved Psychiatrist of 13 years, Dr. Wayne Fenton, Deputy Director of Schizophrenia Research at NIMH, when he was **MURDERED**, trying to engage another patient who was very ill and refusing medications.

Some who oppose SB480 and AOT in general say it is a violation of the person's civil liberties; but when the cost of that idea is murder and mayhem in our society, we need to rethink our ideas of civil liberties. Dr. Fenton lost not just his civil liberties but his **life**. An individual who is psychotic has no civil liberties. They have been stolen by the illness that took away rational thought. Providing treatment through Assisted Outpatient Treatment, to those with severe illness who cannot understand they are ill, can restore their rational thoughts and abilities to exercise their civil rights. This is the only humane path to follow.