

Bill Number: SB 480

Initials: S.H.

Position: SUPPORT

I've been a resident of Montgomery County, District 18, since 2013. I've spent the last 14 years working in the mental health field and I'm currently a student in the MSW program at the University of Maryland School of Social Work. I do have professional insight into this issue but I'd like to share a personal story in support of SB480/HB823 regarding Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT).

My mother-in-law, Jan, passed away in 2019, the week of Mother's Day. For nearly a decade Jan struggled with complex mental illness. Overtime she was no longer able to work and eventually retreated into complete isolation. She became estranged from her friends and family because she was no longer behaving in socially acceptable ways. For years, my husband and I lived in a toxic state of anxiety trying to help Jan. I've worked in mental health for more than 14 years and my knowledge of resources to help Jan was useless because she wasn't able to engage with treatment. As her mental health declined so did her physical health. She was diagnosed with breast cancer and because of her untreated mental health, she delayed cancer treatment resulting in her cancer becoming terminal. Those who argue against AOT see it as a violation of freedom. I encourage you to view AOT as a chance at freedom for those with serious mental illness who have become victims of the imprisonment of their illness. There is a neurological condition called anosognosia that a lot of people with SMI have which actually prevents them from having insight into their illness. So not engaging in treatment is not a matter of will-power, it's the result of a neurological condition. If AOT had been a path my husband and I could have pursued for Jan, maybe she'd be here today.