

SB480 Testimony

Kristina Rolfes

13021 Gent Rd.

Reisterstown, MD 21136

Baltimore County

Position: SUPPORT

My name is Kristina Rolfes, and I am a family member of a person with severe mental illness. My brother was at various times locked up, homeless, beaten, and suffering without help from a debilitating mental illness because Maryland does not offer Assisted Outpatient Treatment.

My family was unable to get treatment for my brother with schizophrenia because he had a lack of insight into his own illness, known as anosognosia, which is the most common reason people with serious mental illness do not accept treatment. Because we could not get him treatment, he deteriorated and suffered from terrifying delusions, auditory hallucinations, personality changes, and an inability to have relationships, hold a job, or even to perceive reality. For my brother and so many others like him, the only way in Maryland to receive effective treatment is after a tragedy occurs, and that's exactly what happened in his case. His delusions caused him to attack my father, who suffered a traumatic brain injury as a result. As for my brother, he was jailed and later locked up in a state hospital, horrified at what he'd done as a result of his delusions.

The only bright side to this horrible story is that because he received treatment while in the forensic hospital, he regained insight and stopped suffering from delusions and hallucinations. After discharge, he continued treatment on an outpatient basis and became a productive member of society, volunteering for NAMI and serving on the board of directors and working as a peer in assertive community treatment for people in crisis. He also was able to marry and have a son. However, it should not have taken this extraordinary tragedy in order to get him treatment.

AOT could have provided the treatment my brother needed, and would have prevented enormous unnecessary suffering and trauma for him and our entire family. I support AOT because it provides a path to treatment for the most vulnerable, prevents the criminalization of mental illness, and because it is compassionate care that saves lives. I ask the committee for a favorable report on SB480.