

My name is Laura Arnold, and I am here today to give testimony in support of passing the MHLN Children's Mental Health Bill. I am a Registered Nurse who has had the privilege and often heartbreaking challenge of caring for pediatric mental health patients in the acute care hospital setting for over 15 years.

We serve patients with complex mental health needs and these patients come to us in a state of crisis because they lack access to adequate services. These patients require targeted interventions when they enter our facility. In the emergency room they are placed in small stripped-down rooms with a cart to sit and sleep on. They are monitored by direct care staff 1:1 to ensure safety. This environment is full of noise and unfamiliar smells/sights/people, they need to be escorted to use the bathroom, and do not have access to a window. This should not be a long-term placement option.

Over the past few years, we have seen a dramatic increase of behavioral health patients coming to the ED in a state of crisis. This increase overwhelms our broken system resulting in multiple patients boarding in the ED for extended periods of time, and extremely long stays on the inpatient floors. This increases incidents and risk of injury to staff, delays therapeutic treatment of patients, causes increased emotional trauma and distress to patients and caregivers, as well as reduces emergency room capacity to care for other medical needs.

Patients and families in this population are very near and dear to my heart because I live their experience. I am the mother of a beautiful young man who has nonverbal autism that presents with severe mood dysregulation, self-injurious behavior, and aggression. I know what it is like to be afraid of your own child. To go through years of therapy/skills training, to have to monitor your child every minute of every day to make sure he doesn't hurt himself or his siblings. To feel like a failure

because you can't always understand what he needs or wants. To be promised help and PCA/Support staff services and hours that never materialize or if they do are not effective d/t lack of skill or consistency.

I tell you this because we are one of the lucky families who received services, had access to stabilization services, and Jacob received placement in a group home where he is finally thriving. But due to the inconsistency in services and lack of quality interventions, we developed strong negative patterns of stress behavior in the household and our entire family struggled.

I don't want other families to have to go through this. For all these reasons, please pass HF 1198 to provide support and treatment for children and families in desperate need of support. One of the rules we have in our house is to say what you mean and do what you say. This bill says what we need...now it is time for you to do something and pass it!

Photos of my son who needs your support:

