

Angela Hughes Byrd

April 17, 2022

Greetings County Council President Gabe Albornoz, Vice President Evan Glass as well as the entire County Council board.

My name is Angela Hughes Byrd and I live in Damascus MD.

I am asking you to support funding for an ombudsman for Residential Rehabilitation Psychiatric Programs for clients who experience conflict with the staff and need assistance resolving the conflict.

I was born in a two-parent household with a brother and raised with the dream of one day being a college graduate, married, a mother, having a successful career and a house. With the help of God and my family, I achieved that dream. However, though I was successful in life, I suffered from depression and anxiety disorder due to insecurities and an extremely bad divorce. I woke up from my American Dream.

Years later I married again and had a son but my marriage did not last long and the trauma from the divorce intensified my depression and I was re-diagnosed to add Bipolar Disorder. My mom became ill with cancer and God called her home in May 2010. Then in July 2010 I lost my brother to a tragic car accident. In 2015 my best friend died unexpectedly during a simple in and out surgery and in 2016 my fiancé was violently murdered. My life spiraled out of control and ultimately, I lost everything. My diagnosis changed again to add PTSD and I moved in with my dad only to discover him deceased in the house 5 months after I moved home. My entire support system was now gone.

I drifted from place to place and finally I was accepted to a residential psychiatric program in Prince George's County. It was clean, my roommates were ok, and I had a productive life that consisted of therapy and church activities. Things were going well but my depression kept rearing its ugly head and I began to drink. Of course, that was a violation of the program and once, discovered staff was unbearable. Staff dictated to me their recovery plan and there was no input from me, no plan of action or follow-up with me. Staff did not show any compassion, I felt dejected, worthless, uninspired, condemned, and most of all unsupported. I needed someone to help me navigate through the conflict without retaliation from the staff.

That someone was God. I stopped drinking through discipline, commitment and prayer. My journey started in Prince George's County, but now I live in Montgomery County in a section 811 independent living apartment. My case manager visits once a week. She acclimated me to my surroundings and benefits. I have a productive life through church activities, community activities, volunteer work and of course, CAI. I have a psychiatrist, therapist, take medications and family support and most of all I seek God in all that I do. My son graduated from college and is now working. Not everyone may be as fortunate to have a strong relationship with Christ who helped me immeasurably and no, I am not 100% there yet but I am on my way to not my same life but a different and exciting new life.

In Maryland, there are over 700,000 people suffering from mental health conditions. The State reported over 600 client complaints yearly. On average Montgomery County receives 5 to 12 client complaints a year. That number may seem low, however, based on lived experience complaints are not submitted due to staff retaliation. The State does have a process for conflict resolution, however, the process does not include client input, a plan of action or follow-up with the client.

Again, I am asking you to support funding for an ombudsman for RRP Programs for clients who experience conflict with the staff and need assistance resolving the conflict.

Thank You For Your Time.