



# Four County Mental Health Center

Serving the Counties of Chautauqua, Cowley, Elk, Montgomery & Wilson

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Established 1964

www.fourcounty.com

Emergency Services  
(800) 499-1748

National Suicide &  
Crisis Lifeline 988

## House of Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

House Bill 2353

February 8, 2024

### In Support of House Bill 2353:

I am Ronda Melton, LMSW and am the Assisted Outreach Coordinator/Clinician for Cowley county. I am currently employed in this position at Four County Mental Health Center. I am testifying in favor of House Bill 2353 based on my experience with the Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) population that would be affected by the recommended changes in this bill.

#### - **Ex Parte Emergency Custody hold extended from 48 to 72 Hours:**

A custody hold being extended from 48 hours to 72 hours, gives the clinician more time to make a thorough evaluation for the need for inpatient or outpatient treatment. It allows more time to gather community resources to assist if the need is determined to be outpatient treatment. If the determination is to move forward with inpatient treatment, 72 hours provides more time for the patient to become more stable in a structured environment, which in turn leads to a more solid and successful discharge back into the community.

#### - **Deterioration Standard in Outpatient Treatment Orders:**

This amendment is needed by clinicians as we often see deterioration during different times of treatment that are not predictable. The outpatient treatment order itself can be a stabilizing factor during these times. This order is used in the Assisted Outpatient Treatment program with all participants. It helps patients to be more accountable for their treatment and helps them to remain more consistent with attending scheduled appointments. We are seeing success with patients stabilizing in the community knowing that they have signed the OTO and know the importance of remaining compliant.

#### - **Requiring the treatment facility to provide a written copy of the treatment plan to the court within 10 days:**

This amendment would help the legal system and the outpatient treatment facility stay informed of what the patients' needs are. Often we are not always able to communicate in a timely manner to the court system to keep them informed of the patients' progress. If all parties supporting the patient are aware of goals and objectives required of the patient, it is only going to benefit the outcome of treatment in a positive way. The more support and awareness the team has, the more likely the patient will succeed in outpatient treatment.



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- **An ex parte order will have the option to suspend if the individual is already on an outpatient treatment order:**

This will allow MHC's and the courts to better track individuals upon entering emergency custody. It will also allow the State Hospitals the ability to discharge or release back to the OTO.

- **Initial Outpatient Treatment Order from 3 to 6 months:**

In regard to increasing the amount of months of the OTO, evidence shows that on average patients see the most change and successes in a 6 month to one-year time frame. After gathering information from my AOT participants at the beginning of their participation on the OTO to their 6-month mark, the surveys they completed reflected a significantly positive change in their consistency with treatment in the outpatient setting. There were less crisis events and less in patient treatment events. The 6-month time frame is more realistic for all involved, to include the court and the mental health treatment teams.

In summary, I am in support of all of the proposed amendments suggested as they appear to be working in the patients favor as well as the community partners favor. These changes would allow all parties to work toward the common goals of making lives better for those in need as well as alleviating unnecessary burdens on providers.

Sincerely,

Ronda Melton, LMSW  
AOT Coordinator  
Four County Mental Health Center, Inc.  
620-221-9664