



Treatment
Advocacy
Center

CATALYST

A NEWSLETTER FROM TREATMENT ADVOCACY CENTER



Lisa Dailey,
Executive Director

Dear Friends,

I am thrilled to announce the reissue of TAC's newsletter **Catalyst** after a long hiatus. **Catalyst** has been a valuable resource for our community, and we are excited to bring it back to you digitally, allowing us to reach an even wider audience, and with even more impactful content.

One of the most significant updates we are proud to share is the recent passage of the assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) bill in Maryland. This achievement is a testament to tireless advocacy over two decades on the part of TAC and many of our Maryland family members, care partners, and grassroots advocates. The dedication of TAC Maryland Ambassador Evelyn Burton cannot be overstated, nor can the efforts of Debra Bennett, whose personal essay we are honored to share with you. Their unwavering commitment to this cause has been nothing short of inspirational.

Ben Bennett Jr.'s story is a heartbreaking reminder of why we must continue our efforts to fix broken laws. The loss of Ben was deeply personal to many of us at TAC, and his struggle underscores the urgency of our mission. Waiting to change laws that impact individuals with severe mental illness (SMI) can mean that help comes too late for those who need it most. The passage of Maryland's AOT bill is a step in the right direction that we can all celebrate.

In this issue of **Catalyst**, we are also pleased to announce an exciting new partnership. It has always been a goal of TAC to get information to those who most need it – individuals and families affected by SMI, advocates, law and policymakers, and members of the media. Each needs this information for different reasons, but a critical part of our mission is to help stakeholders and the public understand the science and policy that affect those with the most severe forms of psychiatric illnesses.

To that end, we are delighted to announce a collaboration with Leap Institute and our friend and hero, Dr. Xavier Amador. Dr. Amador, acclaimed author of ["I Am Not Sick, I Don't Need Help."](#) is a leading expert on anosognosia and compassionate treatment options for those with SMI. We are honored to have him join us as Scientific Officer on TAC's public education and research team. Dr. Amador's expertise and passion will be instrumental in creating and distributing valuable content for our community, including what research reveals about the causes of SMI and breakthroughs in treatment.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our shared mission. We hope you will enjoy this issue of **Catalyst**, and share it widely in your circles!

Warm regards,

Lisa Dailey
Executive Director
Treatment Advocacy Center

Maryland Passes AOT Law!

Maryland Governor Wes Moore signs AOT into law.



For more than two decades, TAC and Maryland advocates have been working to promote a law in the state to allow for court-supervised, outpatient mental health treatment known as assisted outpatient treatment (AOT). 2024 was the year we succeeded!

On May 16, Maryland Governor Wes Moore signed into law [House Bill 576/](#) [Senate Bill 453](#), making Maryland the 48th state with a statute that allows for AOT. The bill authorizes each county in Maryland to establish an AOT program for individuals with “serious and persistent mental illness.” And if a county does not establish a program, the Maryland Department of Health must do so by July 1, 2026, meaning all counties must comply with the law and offer AOT.

TAC Maryland ambassador and board member Evelyn Burton was instrumental in pushing for and ultimately achieving passage of this bill. Evelyn’s persistence and tenacity are unparalleled in our community. She has served as a leader, coordinator, mentor, and friend of Maryland advocates and TAC for over 20 years. We owe Evelyn a debt of tremendous gratitude for never giving up!

Looking forward, TAC will increase advocacy efforts in Connecticut and Massachusetts, the two remaining states without AOT laws. We will not rest until the lifesaving tool of AOT becomes available everywhere and to everyone who can benefit from it.



Personally Speaking: It's too late for my son, but Maryland's AOT bill might save others

By Debra Bennett



Debra Bennett

My beloved son, Ben, was a creative and playful child, a leader on and off the football field, and a man of deep hope and faith with an abiding love for his family. Ben was born on November 23, 1988, and was raised in Capitol Heights, Maryland. He was a calm and charismatic child, and was creative, spiritual, and athletically gifted.

He and his younger sister, Andrea, had a close, protective, lifelong bond. He was active in his faith and expressed his love for God and his family through tattoos. In high school, his talent as a football player was noted by recruiters, and he accepted a full ride athletic scholarship to play football at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. He was a leader on and off the field.

Ben also had severe mental illness, and his death on December 8, 2023, from an anoxic brain injury, might have been prevented had assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) been an option in our home state of Maryland. You see, Ben had a severe bilateral hearing disability, resulting in him having complex behavioral health needs; AOT would have been a tool enabling treatment for his whole person.

Ben had received voluntary treatment many times after his diagnosis, but his illness prevented him from recognizing his need for continuous treatment, a condition known as *anosognosia*; this led Ben to go in and out of treatment programs, experience psychiatric deterioration, and eventually cycle through one hospital after another.

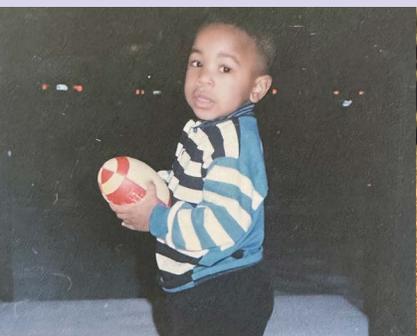
Since 2020, Ben had undergone 18 hospitalizations in six Maryland counties and Baltimore city. Despite having a supportive family and an advocating mother, he was unable to remain engaged in treatment. In our last conversation together, Ben thanked me for supporting him and told me he was going to be successful this time. A little over a week later, he died. If Maryland had had an AOT program, Ben would have had a much better chance at success.

[The ratification of Senate Bill 453 and House Bill 576](#) was the culmination of 38 years of advocacy efforts in Maryland. I, and members of over 100 other families – six of whom have lost a loved one suffering from serious mental illness – gave personal testimony over the last four years to various representatives and committees.

Maryland's new AOT law allows circuit courts to order a specific mental health treatment regimen for someone with severe and persistent mental health needs. It provides structure and support through a care coordination team to keep people engaged in treatment, potentially stopping the cycle of symptoms that can lead to hospitalization and/or criminal legal involvement, and then further deterioration.

It's been my prayer for many years that this lifesaving mental health legislation would pass. While it is too late for my son, AOT can save the life of someone else, the lives of many others in fact; for that, I am deeply grateful.

Pictures of Ben over the years



Outdoor Cats: Dr. Torrey on Infectious Agents and Schizophrenia



Dr. E. Fuller Torrey

In the 1970s, our founder, Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, published his first papers on infectious agents as a potential cause of schizophrenia, which included the possibility of cats as potential agents of infection. In the 1990s, his first publications on the potential link between cats and schizophrenia were published, and in the years since, Dr. Torrey's work on the topic gained traction as studies began to show a correlation between cat ownership in childhood and schizophrenia later in life.

The link, Dr. Torrey explained, was in the infection caused by the single-celled parasite *toxoplasma gondii*, common in cats who are allowed outdoors, and present in their feces. The majority of non-immunocompromised people who are infected with *toxoplasma gondii* will show no symptoms, but the parasite can be transmitted from a pregnant person to their fetus before birth.

In his 2022 open-access book, [“Parasites, Pussycats and Psychosis: The Unknown Dangers of Human Toxoplasmosis,”](#) Dr. Torrey summarized all the data that was then available to support the idea of a connection between cats and psychosis. Since then, additional studies have been released confirming a correlation between cat ownership and schizophrenia. In [“Cat Ownership and Schizophrenia-](#)

[Related Disorders and Psychotic-Like Experiences: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,”](#) authors McGrath, Lim and Saha concluded, from existing literature and studies on the subject, that there is a definite link between cat exposure and broadly-defined schizophrenia-related disorders.

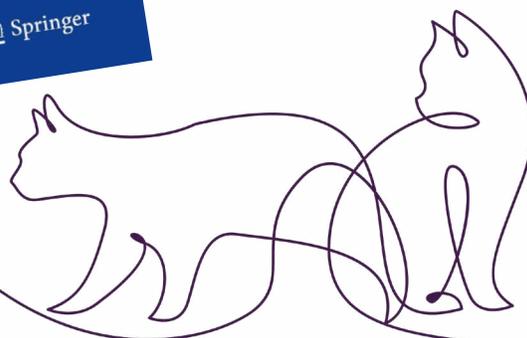
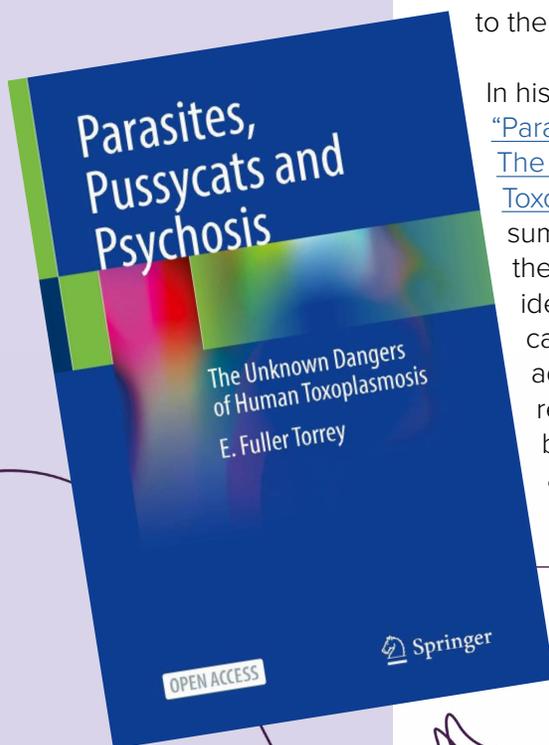
The systematic review examined 17 studies and, even after adjusting for a wide variety of covariates, the relationship was statistically significant. The investigators concluded, “After adjusting for covariates, we found that individuals exposed to cats had approximately twice the odds of developing schizophrenia.”

It is important to note that the studies can only confirm correlation, not causation, at this time. A recent [article](#) in Psychology Today emphasized that schizophrenia is a highly nuanced and multi-faceted condition, likely with a number of contributing factors.

When asked about cats as a risk factor for developing psychosis, Dr. Torrey explained: “Cats make very nice pets but they should be kept exclusively inside. There is now enough data suggesting that the parasite that causes toxoplasmosis may be involved in some cases of psychosis. NIMH should be supporting trials of drugs that are effective against this parasite.”

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— Dr. Torrey



TAC Implementation – Dismiss Upon Civil Commitment with AOT



We at TAC know from lived experience that when a loved one with SMI is involved with the criminal legal system, figuring out how to help them can be incredibly complicated and emotionally fraught; the systems and processes in place are difficult to understand, frustrating to navigate, and created with punishment, rather than treatment, in mind.

Local governments often don't know that there is another option that can drastically help people living with untreated SMI who enter the criminal legal system; nor are they aware of the cascading positive effects that removing non-violent criminal offenders with SMI from jails and prisons can have on the entire community and society at large.

TAC recognized the need to break down the problem and offer a workable solution. Our [“Dismiss Upon Civil Commitment with AOT Handbook”](#) is the product of months of hard work by TAC's implementation team. The accompanying [video](#) was created by our in-house animator, Nate Evans, along with TAC advocate, Martha Stringer, who kindly and generously shared her personal story of how DCC with AOT could have helped her daughter.

If you haven't had the chance to watch our video yet, we hope you will, and encourage you to share in your circles. Widespread adoption and implementation of DCC with AOT could make the difference in the lives of countless individuals and families.

Martha Stringer shares her personal story of how DCC with AOT could have helped her daughter.



Looking to the Future – Welcoming Dr. Xavier Amador as our Scientific Officer



Dr. Xavier Amador

At TAC, advocacy is literally our middle name, and a key part of advocacy is educating the public, policymakers, and stakeholders. For generations, people with SMI have faced misunderstanding, stigma, criminalization, and unconscionable treatment due to misunderstanding of their diagnosis and lack of access to treatment options. A cornerstone to TAC's theory of change is translating and disseminating the latest scientific developments related to SMI to those who need it most.

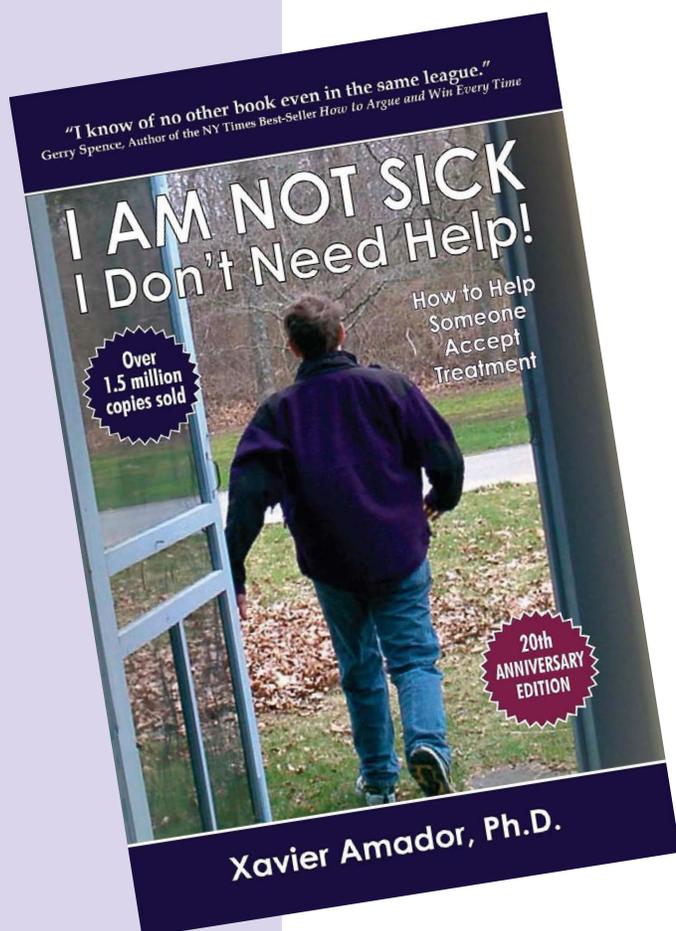
To this end, we are thrilled to welcome internationally renowned clinical psychologist, author, speaker, and subject matter expert on anosognosia, Dr. Xavier Amador, as TAC's new scientific officer on our public education and research team. Dr. Amador brings a wealth of expertise and credibility, and is much loved throughout the

SMI community. His leadership will be instrumental in guiding TAC's scientific and educational endeavors.

As part of this partnership, TAC will also be launching an innovative new podcast, *SMI Spotlight*. Hosted by Dr. Amador, this multimedia platform will welcome subject-matter expert guests to discuss key issues surrounding SMI. At the end of each episode, *Ask Dr. Amador* will address the specific question and concerns of members of our community, like you!

SMI Spotlight seeks to increase solidarity and support within our community, and offer educated discourse on the latest in research and treatment for people living with SMI.

To learn more about Dr. Amador, watch his Ted Talk [here](#).



2025 National AOT Symposium & Learning Collaborative



MARCH
27-28, 2025

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A reminder to mark your calendars for the 2025 National AOT Symposium & Learning Collaborative, to be held March 27-28 in Annapolis, Maryland. More information and registration coming soon!