

**Testimony of Jeff Knight,
Recovery Advocate**

**House of Representatives Health & Human Services Subcommittee
Chairman, Representative Sprague
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Good morning Chairman Sprague, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the House Health and Human Services Subcommittee. My name is Jeff Knight and I am a person living in recovery in Cuyahoga County. Without assistance from the community behavioral health system I would not be able to share my recovery story with you today.

My opioid addiction began with painkillers. After being admitted to the emergency room for a jaw injury after a fight in a bar, I was prescribed Percocet. I started abusing Percocet and then began using Oxycontin because my tolerance increased, my addiction progressed and I wanted something stronger. As this cycle continued to grow, I turned to heroin because it was cheaper and easier to get than the other prescription drugs I was abusing.

Before becoming addicted to drugs, I had a wonderful, quote on quote “normal” upbringing. I was raised in a good home, graduated high school in a well-established suburban neighborhood, and I owned and operated a successful landscaping company for eight years managing 10 to 15 employees.

During the last four years of owning my business, my lifestyle contributed to my downward spiral of addiction. After high school, I began abusing alcohol which led to the use of other drugs like cocaine. With each progression to a harder drug, my standards got lower and lower. In order to feed my addiction, I began selling cocaine and Percocet to buy more drugs.

In one year of using heroin, I destroyed my relationship with my family, sold off my business, and acquired my first felony drug charge. When I was being sentenced for my felony, the judge decided to send me to drug court which forced me into a community treatment center.

I received services from several community providers and while the services they offered were effective, I know from experience that treatment doesn't work unless the individual is ready to get sober. That being said, I would never have made the decision to stop using drugs if I wasn't forced into drug court.

After being introduced to drug court and going through treatment, I was given the opportunity to move into a sober living facility rather than going back to my old environment where I was using drugs.

The benefits of the sober-living facilities, that helped me to get sober, are the random drug tests, supervision and accountability, support group of my peers, and recovering addicts providing encouragement and support.

I was able to use this time to work on my sobriety, catch up on my debts and learn how to live as a productive member of society.

How did I function as a productive member of society? These sober-living facilities made such a powerful and positive impact on my life, I was glad to have the opportunity to provide others with the same chance to get their life back on track.

I was provided an opportunity to acquire some houses in the inner city. I bought a fixer upper and rehabbed it to make it nice and allow recovering addicts to live there in a sober environment. I did this so that others could reap the same benefits that I was provided by transitional sober living. In turn, I am able to help someone struggling with a drug addiction to become sober and this rewarding position helps to keep me sober today.

I want to stress that without a consistent funding source in the community the providers that helped me will not be able to continue to offer help to people to beat addictions. I ask you to consider restoring \$30 million per year of this upcoming budget and placing it in the 421 Continuum of Care line item, so people like me will have the opportunity to start a new life.