

Ohio Senate Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee

**Testimony of:
Amy Pulver, Co-Founder of The Hope Spot
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Chairman Hackett, Vice-Chair Tavares, and members of the Senate Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee, good morning.

My name is Amy Pulver. I am a co-founder and the executive director of The Hope Spot, a recovery support center in Xenia. I advocate for individuals with mental illness, substance use disorders and their family members. Like most advocates, I have personally been affected by the addiction and mental illness of several loved ones. I am excited, and I appreciate this opportunity to share a positive perspective about recovery with you.

How does a young widow of an opiate addict share a positive perspective about recovery? It is simple in that I wholeheartedly believe that recovery works. As the director of a recovery support center, I am a witness to it every day. I spend my days working to continue nurturing the growth local addicts have achieved in treatment. I want you to understand that our idea of recovery support is more than the “latest lingo” tossed about in the conversation of addiction. We provide valuable services and support for people learning a new way to live and cope. Recovery support centers are a safe place for people to go when vulnerability and boredom strikes, a place where people can give back and feel a part of, instead of excluded from. These centers provide resources to those interested in finding treatment options and services. We encourage people to face their fears, own the consequences of their past behaviors and remind them that they are worthy and capable of achieving greatness. We offer perspective, hope and encouragement.

At The Hope Spot, we not only address the needs of those in recovery from substance use disorders and mental illness, we also provide support and encourage recovery for family members. I believe that family recovery is essential and of the utmost importance. I know that it provided me with the tools necessary to manage my life during the years my husband struggled with an opiate addiction. It also helped me understand and change the behaviors I developed growing up in an alcoholic home. Consider the number of addicts who have overdosed in the last few years, the number of people on waiting lists to get into treatment and the people currently in active addiction. For every one addict, how many family members are affected? Honestly, the numbers are staggering. The family members far outnumber those addicted and, yet, there’s rarely any mention of our mental, psychological or physical health. The disease of addiction has the tremendous power of isolating those who are using and their families. It feeds on guilt, shame and the lack of knowledge.

My family understands that substance use disorder isn’t a matter of love and that it isn’t about a lack of affection for the family. It’s about willpower. This awareness helped us cope with the unexpected death of my husband, Brandon, in June of 2014. Brandon was an amazing father, a loving son and my very best friend. He was a Christian who attended church and was a very intelligent man. Recovery did not fail Brandon. He was provided great treatment, a lot of love

and support. Brandon was unwilling to let go of the notion that his addiction was some sort of moral failing, and he refused to take full advantage of the support available to him. He was plagued with old school ways of thinking and would often tell me that the rest of us would be better off without him.

On June 13, 2014, he surrendered to his demons. It's my belief that he intentionally ended his life by snorting a lethal amount of fentanyl. He had been prescribed an opiate pain medication after a work injury when he was 33 years old. He was just 39 years old at the time of his death. My family would suffer another loss just 87 days later with the passing of my 56 year old brother, Phillip, who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was 18 years old. After years of self-medicating, Phillip would die of a heroin overdose.

Addiction will take down as many people as it can. It could easily have destroyed our family, but I am unwilling to become another one of its victims. I work a 12-step program of recovery for those affected by someone else's addiction. My children will grow up without their father's guidance, encouragement and laughter; of course, I can't fill this void in their lives, but I can and will fight ignorance and stigma associated with this disease. My children know their father was a good and kind man, and they also know he struggled with a hideous disease. I will continue to support those fighting daily to recover, and I will be a voice for families.

I would like to thank the state of Ohio for the funding that has been provided for recovery support in Greene County, and I ask that you continue to support our efforts and recognize the value of these centers. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to advocate and speak for the entire recovery community, including families.