

Jeffrey Kamms
Senate Finance Committee
Testimony on HB 33 (SFY 2024-25 Operating Budget)
June 8, 2023

Chair Dolan and Members of the Senate Finance Committee -

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony today.

My name is Jeffrey Kamms, and I am the Executive Director of Road to Hope, Inc., a recovery housing organization serving Northern and Northeastern Ohio since 2007.

Recovery housing is a critical component of the continuum of care for persons with substance use disorder. A recovery home is not defined by the people who live in the home, but the environment that is created. At our recovery homes we provide a safe, supportive living environment that people can live together in recovery, finding support and healing in structured environment, while also gaining critical recovery capital and life skills.

For example,

Here is Deidre's story in her own words:

My name is Deidre. I came to RTH on June 10th, 2021. I was pregnant with my daughter and had nothing but the clothes on my back. I am 31 years old, and I have struggled on and off with the disease of addiction for about 8 years. As a chronic relapser, in and out of the court system I was hopeless and broken. The Road to Hope program gave me hope and my life changed by the grace of God. RTH offered a supportive and safe place where I was truly able to take the time to heal overall. At RTH, I attended treatment for my substance use disorder. I met with a mental health counselor and even took an online parenting course via zoom! I went to 5 meetings a week for 1 whole year, along with free room and board for my daughter and I. They offered resources for daycares and multiple other things; I was able to start working. I lived at Genesis for about a year and then The Village opened where I was able to have my own unit with my daughter in honors housing. This program is beneficial for single mothers who are looking for a fresh start on life free from drugs and alcohol. RTH has shown me accountability, structure, and stability. It wasn't easy starting over but with the RTH encouraging me every step of the way, it saved my life. Now, I am an active member in AA and working a 12-step recovery program. My family is in my life as well as my children. RTH helped me build a new foundation for myself as I continue to grow as a young woman in my recovery!

And Jessica's story:

July 13th, 2019, my recovery journey began. I came into The Road to Hope's recovery program at 21 years old, pregnant, scared and lost. I did not know who I was or how to live a normal productive life. The staff at RTH made me feel welcomed and hopeful for the future. I was given a clean, safe, and

sober environment to live in and call my home. They helped me apply for resources for food and had a donations room that I was able to get clothes, hygiene's, and baby items from which was very helpful because I had nothing. They also linked me with treatment and mental health services that also offered family support and groups.

I recommend RTH to anyone struggling with substance use disorder because of their holistic approach to recovery by providing resources to heal physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially. Throughout my time in their housing, they obtained grants that paid for my rent while I focused on myself, my recovery, and my child. The RTH program taught me how to be a functioning member of society, a woman of integrity and respect and how to maintain long term sobriety. They always encouraged and motivated me to achieve the goals that the director and I set for my life. With their help I was able to obtain gainful employment, pay off court fines/restitution, get my driver's license, get a car, car insurance, save money to get an apartment and most importantly regain my sanity!

Without the help of this program and the resources I was given while at RTH I do not believe I would be sober and living the amazing life that I live today with my daughter in our own home. Today I GET to go to work, help others, be a mother, be a part of my family and enjoy a life I never dreamed I would have. I will forever be grateful for everything they have done for me.

I know recovery housing works, and it is not just because I see results like this every day. We also have data that demonstrates that recovery housing works. Statewide we see that:

- 88% of residents who are moving out of recovery housing indicate that they are connected to ongoing recovery support services to maintain long term recovery when they are leaving recovery housing, with nearly 75% connected to certified peer support.
- 57% of residents had no income when they moved into recovery housing. At six months of living in recovery housing, only 23% of residents did not have an income.
- Nearly 1 in 5 recovery residents reported having an income of \$25,000 or more after living in recovery housing for six months.
- Over 50% of residents have over \$5,000 in debt when they move into recovery housing, compared to 42% of residents at move out. While this may not seem like a small decrease, considering the relatively low incomes of residents of recovery housing, it is impressive how many are able to use living in an affordable recovery home as an opportunity to pay off debt and prepare for the future.
- After six months, 17% of residents achieved a high school diploma or equivalent, 5% achieved technical or vocational certification.¹

Recovery Housing is desperately needed. According to a recent analysis using the Calculating An Adequate System Tool (CAST) developed by SAMHSA and adjusted specifically for recovery housing,

¹ Gallant, K (2023). Ohio Recovery Housing Resident Outcomes Report: May – December 2022. Mighty Crow Media, LLC.

only 31% of total recovery housing capacity is being met across Ohio². Our programs in Cuyahoga, Lorain, and Erie County often have to turn men and women away, simply because we do not have the capacity to serve them. The moment that they reach out for help is critical, we may not get another opportunity.

We know that recovery housing offers a solid return on investment. We see in research that a conservative estimate of the net benefit of a stay in a recovery housing setting is about \$17,830³. This benefit comes from reduced likelihood of incarceration, reduced likelihood of hospitalization, as well as increases in resident employment and income. Based on these estimates, researchers estimate that Ohio's existing recovery housing network has saved the state of Ohio \$34,897,500 in reduced criminal activity, reduced health care spending, and other expenses related to addiction in 2022. Overall, the total economic benefit to Ohio of Ohio's existing recovery housing network is just over \$51 million – this figure includes the previously mentioned cost savings as well as the increased income of residents – as residents of recovery housing are likely to further their education, reduce their debt, and gain ongoing stable employment⁴.

Our organization relies on support from a variety of different sources to fund our operation. This support comes from local funding, state grants, federal dollars, private donations, private grants as well as self-pay residents. One of the critical funding sources that we need is the Recovery Housing Initiative funds in the General Revenue Fund.

The current version of HB 33 includes confusing language that may misconstrue the purpose of these dollars by referring to capital appropriation guidelines. The historical purpose of these funds is to provide ongoing operating assistance for recovery housing operators and to support the continuous quality of the recovery homes for Ohioans who need them. We need it to be clear that these dollars are intended to be used for operations. Recovery housing operators may continue to partner with their local county boards to apply for appropriate capital funding through the existing capital programs.

We also know that quality matters. Our organization is proudly certified to operate recovery housing. Unfortunately, across our state there are many recovery housing operators who choose not to become certified. It only takes a couple of low quality or bad actors in this space to make it more difficult for those of us who are trying to do things the correct way to get a bad name. Once recovery

² Green, B. Mapping the Gap: An Assessment of Capacity, Cost-Benefits, and Disparities in Utilization in Ohio Recovery Residences. 2023

³ Lo Sasso AT, Byro E, Jason LA, Ferrari JR, Olson B. Benefits and costs associated with mutual-help community-based recovery homes: The Oxford House model. *Eval Program Plann.* 2012 Feb;35(1):47-53. doi: 10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2011.06.006. Epub 2011 Jul 22. PMID: 22054524; PMCID: PMC3596872.

⁴ Green, B. Mapping the Gap: An Assessment of Capacity, Cost-Benefits, and Disparities in Utilization in Ohio Recovery Residences. 2023

housing has a bad reputation in the community, it is nearly impossible to earn the local support and trust that is needed to operate quality recovery housing effectively.

For example,

There is a “sober house” in our community that is not certified and has no oversight. The city safety services director reached out because all the neighbors were calling and complaining about residents at the home, they were drinking out on the porch. They were creating a disturbance to the neighborhood along with residents using drugs in the home. The Safety Services Director asked if there was anything that I could do. Which I responded not really, they are not a certified recovery home and there is really no oversight or process to address this, except for the local authorities.

Road to Hope received a call a couple week ago of 10 men being displace from a “sober living home”. This home was not certified and not registered with any entity to hold them to a standard. Eventually, the city received word of men being moved into a home violating several city codes. A cease and desist was served and these newly sober men had additional stress added to them with facing instant homelessness. This is a couple of the many homes in the community we serve that are not certified; in a city that already struggles with NIMBY, these homes ruin the reputations of legit, certified recovery homes in many communities.

There are many other examples that could be given along with so many situations where the individuals at their most vulnerable point in their lives. Just trying to survive life and believe that they are being given a second chance at life, only to move in and be taken advantage of by the place that they believed would save their life. This is why we need certified recovery homes and language for that.

The House passed version of HB 33 contained essential provisions that would create a registry of recovery homes, as well as establish a quality process for recovery residences. Under this language, OhioMHAS would be able to accept certification from nationally recognized entities including the National Alliance of Recovery Residences State Affiliate or Oxford House, Inc, or others as identified by the Department.

We are supportive of this strategy, because it allows our state to increase the quality of recovery residences and protect residents of recovery housing without unnecessary growth to state government or requiring additional rule making.

As someone who runs an organization, I understand that sometimes, certification can seem like unnecessary red tape. However, I am here as a service provider to tell you that these policy changes are desperately needed. Without the ability to control bad actors and address concerns regarding recovery housing, our entire industry is negatively impacted when bad actors are allowed to continue to operate. Indeed, it would be extremely helpful for our organization to have to spend less time responding to concerns about recovery housing that comes from bad actors – allowing us more time and resources to support our residents and grow our organizations to meet the capacity needs in Ohio.

People in recovery deserve and need a quality living environment that provides them a safe home, a place to rediscover their purpose, a sense of community, and the ability to continue on their journey toward a healthy life. Our neighbors deserve to know high quality recovery housing services are being offered by organizations that recognize the importance of being responsible good neighbors and value being part of the community. I ask that you support the increased funding for recovery housing as well as the critical policy provisions in the OhioMHAS budget that would increase access and quality of recovery homes across Ohio.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey M Kamms