

Proponent Summary

Wednesday, November 15th, 2023

My name is Ted St. John.

I believe everyone is recovering from something...and I believe people recover.

I'm a person in long-term recovery with almost 15 years of complete abstinence. I am the Founder and Chief Executive of Hope Town Inc. This nonprofit organization (formed in 2019) serves adults with addictions through a full ecosystem of services that include housing, employment, transportation, jail reentry, peer support and community linkage & navigation services. We also began a social enterprise called Hope On Wheels and provide 1,000 rides a month.

Prior to Hope Town, I've worked at every level within many treatment centers, from direct service through leadership. I serve on many boards & local coalitions like the Specialty Drug Courts advisory board in Portage County, Board of Directors for Ohio Recovery Housing. I represent 18 townships in Portage County on the One Ohio Region 13 board. I'm an elected vice president of my hometown school board and a veteran of the US Air Force.

I am also a father. My daughter was four when I got clean. She is 19 now and there is nothing I am prouder of than my commitment to her. I was at every father/daughter dance...coached all her softball teams...there for every moment...we are now both obsessed with working out and our bond is remarkable to anyone that knows us.

Without recovery, my story might have sounded more like my father's (and his father's). Alcoholism, addiction, mental illness, schizophrenia, homelessness, anger, and pain. That is not my story today. My story is one of hope, resiliency, integrity, and responsibility. People count on me. People depend on me, and I show up. Every Day.

I was invited here to provide testimony in support of this CMHA position and I felt strongly enough to drive down here to ask for your support...and to support my community partners as they do their part to contribute to the solution. It's gonna take all of us to do our part. Our Governor said it best..." Our system is not broken...it was never fully built". I believe that this CMHA position is one of the pieces that needs to be added to our provider services and here is why.

As a person with lived experience. Most of my life I was high functioning and on paper, everything seemed ok. I was driven and successful...but I had secrets...a double life and a phony image and it was a house of cards. I lived most of my adult life with depression, anxiety, sleep disorder, my drug of choice was "more". The last couple of years I was full of apathy and suicidal ideation. This 25-year progressive illness was all a result of untreated childhood trauma. In a desperate moment, for my daughter...I made a decision...asked for help...and the short story is I was helped to treat the trauma...and learned how to

live with my thoughts & feelings...and still today (5,280 days later) the obsession to use...the depression and anxiety no longer control me.

Trauma is simply a life-changing event...and manifests itself in many destructive ways. When trauma manifests itself in substance use disorder, like me...left untreated it results in jails, institutions, and death. I say, untreated trauma results in jails, institutions and death. Trauma is treatable....and you cannot treat addiction until you treat the trauma...

I heard it said recently, "If you apply enough pressure to any bone & it's gonna break. Apply enough trauma to any human & they're gonna have a trauma response. It doesn't mean the bone or the human was especially weak...it means the pressure was enough to cause the reaction. No more, no less."

There were episodes during my addiction that resulted with me needing to interact with healthcare, law enforcement and behavioral health professionals. Most did not fully grasp my condition well enough and could never reach me...it was shockingly easy for me to mask the severity of my mental health and addiction with them. They didn't know what they were dealing with. At 40 years old...almost 15 years ago...When I met a few that did understand addiction and recovery...they cut right through to me...and I heard them...I believed them...I followed them...and it changed everything for me...and my family...and now my community.

The key is to have the right services, the right providers at the right moment. If I break my leg in a car accident and I go to a physical therapy office in a shopping plaza to get help...I'm at the wrong bus stop. They can't help me there. For somebody with addiction/mental health...if you can't help me in that moment...I'm gone...until the next episode.

I was blessed with a big God, the support of many and the humility that made my recovery possible. For a guy like me to be here today, in good condition, full of hope and driven to help others is unlikely, but absolutely possible...I'm proof.

I've been in the center of this addiction crisis, serving the best I can, every day, for almost 15 years. I've worked with and around thousands and thousands of people with addiction through some of their worst moments...What I see every day is the result of trauma. I recently owned and operated an outpatient counseling center for adults with addictions. Outpatient treatment is more effective only if you can stabilize the person fast enough to keep them from relapsing while they are in process. Many need medication to even enter this process...to expect success without immediate interventions is unrealistic.

Our people need access to care...to the right provider with the right training. I believe strongly that the CMHA position being proposed here today is a necessary one to help us more effectively support people when the opportunity presents.