

Speech at the Statehouse

Thank you Chair Click, Vice Chair Mullins, Ranking Member Brewer and members of Community Revitalization for the opportunity to testify on HB58.

My name is Edwin Martell, and I come before you wearing multiple hats—a son of someone who suffers from substance use disorder, a constituent, and a former City Councilman of Portsmouth, Ohio. Each of these roles has given me a unique perspective on the issues we're here to discuss today, and I appreciate the opportunity to share them with you.

A little over four years ago, I sat in a room filled with concerned residents of my ward. The topic of discussion was Recovery housing. Their concerns were real, and like any responsible representative, I took a deep dive into the issue to try and understand the problem. What I found was a system riddled with gaps—so many, in fact, that it felt like a never ending black hole.

I started by looking into our city's zoning laws, only to discover that they hadn't been updated since World War II. So I pushed for an update, which I'm sure other small cities also require. But things got worse. Code enforcement officers were reporting some recovery homes that lacked basic necessities—while some are great, some at that time, had no hot water, no proper plumbing, even portable toilets set up in backyard.

These are supposed to be places of healing, yet they are being operated by some with inadequate oversight or safety measures for the people inside them.

When I started working toward solutions to this, I quickly realized that oversight wasn't just lacking—it was actively resisted. Instead of open discussions on how to fix the problem, I was met with threats of lawsuits. I was told that attempting to regulate recovery housing in any way was discrimination. **It's not discrimination to require fairness. It's discrimination to exempt people in Recovery from the same rights and protections everyone else has.**

Let me be absolutely clear: **this is not about trying to prevent recovery housing from existing. It is about ensuring that the people inside these homes are protected, supported, and given a real chance at success.**

I ask you this—if nursing homes and other healthcare facilities have to follow legal procedures to ensure their tenants live in habitable conditions, then why should recovery house operators be allowed to bypass those same regulations? Why should individuals in recovery, who are in a vulnerable state, be subjected to substandard living conditions with no real recourse?

- There is **Inadequate oversight in recovery housing**
- There is **Inadequate accountability for client care**
- There are **Inadequate contingency plans for out-of-town clients**
 - **Inadequate protections and rights for the tenants**

These aren't just concerns in Portsmouth. **These are issues affecting communities all across Ohio.** That's why **House Bill 58 is so critical.** It ensures that recovery housing meets **basic health and safety standards**—something that should never be optional in the first place. It creates **accountability** so that operators can no longer run these homes recklessly and without consequences for failing their residents. It protects **both the individuals in recovery and the communities where these homes exist** by ensuring that they are actually serving their intended purpose.

This bill is not anti-recovery housing. This bill is **pro-recovery, pro-safety, and pro-community.**

Portsmouth has been on the frontlines of the addiction crisis for years. We've seen the devastation, but we've also seen what real recovery looks like when it's done right. But we can't expect success when we refuse to put basic safeguards in place. **Recovery should not be a gamble.** It also should not be a business model that preys on the vulnerable. We shouldn't love our Recovery community any less than our Retirement community.

House Bill 58 is a step in the right direction—not just for Portsmouth, but for communities across Ohio.

I urge you to support it. Support it for the families who believe their loved ones are in safe housing. Support it for the communities trying to navigate the consequences of unregulated facilities. **And most of all, please, support it for the people in recovery who deserve better.**

Thank you again for your time, and thank you, State Rep. Justin Pizzuli, for your leadership on this critical issue.