

House Resolution No. 590 Testimony

Testimony of: Angelica Fiore-Torres, Executive Assistant and Director of Residential Services, RASE Project

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony on **HR 590: Access to Treatment**. My name is Angelica Fiore-Torres and I work for the RASE Project. The RASE Project is a non-profit, Recovery Community Organization that serves nine counties in Central Pennsylvania. RASE Project services include Buprenorphine Coordination of Care, Vivitrol Coordination of Care, Recovery Specialist Services, Education & Advocacy, Warm-Handoff for Overdose Survivors, Bridges for Recovery, Recovery Centers and Recovery Houses. All the employees at RASE are members of the Recovery Community and provide a unique vantage point and ability to establish a lasting and trusting bond with our clients. In the 14/15 fiscal year RASE touched the lives of 4,647 individuals. More than 600 of those individuals were engaged in our Buprenorphine Program and many others accessed our other programs. Still others simply came for help to get into treatment.

Over the past decade we have witnessed opioid addiction multiply at a frightening rate indicative of the current nationwide pandemic. More and more individuals and families come to us for help and many of them are in need of residential detoxification and/or treatment placements. With the implementation of Medicaid Expansion we have been able to successfully place more people in detox or treatment than ever before. However, this puts an enormous strain on the residential programs in Pennsylvania, making it very difficult to find available detox or treatment beds on any given day. It has become necessary to get more funding so that existing or new treatment programs can create more beds for the people who need them. There is also the need for additional funding for those individuals who are not eligible for Medical Assistance.

As has been the case for decades with those who have private insurance, accessing residential treatment can be extremely exasperating. Private insurers continue to limit access to treatment and/or the number of days a person can stay in residential treatment. Even with Act 106 on the books, insurers still manage to find ways to get around giving people the treatment they are entitled to. This type of run-around is so difficult, especially for those who are hurting, vulnerable, sick, and easy to dissuade. When a person suffering from Substance Use Disorder becomes ready to get help, time is of the essence. If they do not get immediate assistance when they need it, they may either go back to using drugs, engage in illegal activities, or die. Rarely does someone manage to stay clean when they have been turned away from going to treatment when they ask for it. This is an issue that needs your immediate and ongoing attention.

I am a woman in long-term recovery. I grew up in a home where drug use was prevalent and both my parents were addicts. As a result I became an addict at a very early age. My drug of choice was heroin and after years of failed attempts, I believed I would never be able to stop using. I was fortunate to find the services I needed through the criminal justice system. The judge who sentenced me in Lackawanna County had the foresight to mandate me to a long-term placement at

RASE House. Prior to coming to RASE House I had no living skills, was without resources and had an extensive criminal background resulting from my drug use. I am living proof that long-term interventions work. While at RASE House I learned the skills I needed to sustain long-term recovery. I went to treatment, built a support system and learned how to care for myself. I developed self-esteem. I discovered that not only was I worthy of being clean, I discovered that I *could stay clean*. I began to like who I am. Shortly after completing RASE House I enrolled in school and acquired an Associate's Degree. Today I work full-time, pay taxes, vote, am married and a mother to a newborn child, go to school full-time in pursuit of my Bachelor's Degree, and continue to work on my recovery. None of this would have been possible if I had not gotten the help I needed. Thank you so much for your efforts to make treatment accessible so that people like me can find a better way of life!