

9-21-16 HR 590 Testimony of John Fabiseski

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Hello, Good afternoon everyone. My name is John Fabiseski and I am a person in long term recovery And what that means to me is I have not put a mind or mood altering substance in my body since January 26<sup>th</sup> 2014. Directly because of my recovery I am able to be a husband, a father, a grandfather, and a friend. Today I am a responsible and productive member of my community. I am the chapter lead of Young People in Recovery Wyoming County PA., and I am employed as a Certified Recovery Specialist in Susquehanna County by Trehab Drug and Alcohol in Montrose Pennsylvania. Advocacy for those with Substance Use Disorder falls under both my Credential as a Certified Recovery Specialist, and my volunteer position as Chapter Lead of Young People in Recovery.

The first barrier to treatment I will discuss today is Transportation

In being a Certified Recovery Specialist I have encountered a plethora of barriers to treatment services. In rural Northeastern Pennsylvania transportation is a crucial barrier that needs to be addressed with urgency. Individuals with Substance Use Disorder in our area need to travel an extensive distance to receive treatment services. For those with transportation barriers there are limited resources for individuals to take an active role in their recovery. Existing services in the area are underfunded and overwhelmed. Individuals making the decision to seek help that meet criteria for services, are then unable to follow after care instructions from residential treatment programs or attend outpatient services because of this barrier. What I propose as a solution to this barrier is implementation of more Certified Recovery Specialists to work alongside existing

treatment services in these areas. As a Certified Recovery Specialist I go out into the community and provide services to these individuals where they live, thus truly meeting people where they are. We as Certified Recovery Specialists empower individuals in their own recovery, by advocating and assisting them in overcoming these barriers. As a Certified Recovery Specialist I have had the great pleasure of seeing my position work as it was intended. A man entered our organization and decided enough was enough and he needed help. After a short meeting we were able to make the connections needed to begin the process. We went to my office and received a call for him to attend a residential inpatient treatment facility. The treatment facility was unable to transport him at that time due to the distance of the facility and time of day. As a CRS I am able to transport anyone who is receiving my services. I was thrilled to escort the man to the facility. We were also able to stop along the way to get the man clothing and other necessities as he had no possessions. Upon arrival I was able to make a warm hand off to the treatment facility. In the following weeks, I traveled to the treatment facility a few times to meet with the man to support him in his recovery. Watching him grow and being a person in his life that shows up when he says he will, was the support he needed for growth. He was accepted into a transitional living facility and is currently seeking active employment. Today he has a support group and is following his aftercare plan. A Certified Recovery Specialist was involved in every aspect of the continuum of his care. Had a CRS not been able available to transport him this story may have had a different conclusion. There is a back story to this also. Some 13 years ago in my active use I was incarcerated with this individual. At the time of that incarceration we had made a pack that years later we would meet up in the hopes our lives had changed. Hopefully with this chance meeting, a warm hand off, and a continuum of care, his path has taken the right steps for a new life.

The next two barriers to treatment I present here today go hand in hand and they are Stigma /Education

The Stigma Surrounding Substance Use Disorder and Mental Health in our area is perhaps the greatest barrier we need to overcome. With stigma we also find a lack of education about Substance Use Disorder and Mental Illness. People are afraid to seek help because of the way they will be viewed and treated in their community. Families often shun and discipline their children harshly, thinking they can punish their way out Substance Use Disorder or Mental Illness. Family members have come to me time and time again saying why can't he or she just stop. They need to be educated that they don't stop because they can't stop. Just like a young woman with anorexia the words are the same, why won't she just eat? More education is needed. Directly because of stigma many fail to seek treatment. I have directly seen individuals travel great distances to seek treatment for fear of how they will be treated if they are discovered in their community. The idea that substance use disorder is a moral failing perpetuates the stigma of Substance Use Disorder further when met with an uncompassionate criminal justice system. The criminal justice system taking a stigmatizing stance on substance use disorder has led to the over population of jails at the county and state level. In removing the stigma from Substance Use Disorder we can better support insurance coverage for treatment and prevention rather than incarceration. The whispers need to stop, the conversations need to happen, and the time of jailing sick people has passed. We are losing an entire generation to this epidemic and the lack of education is shaming people to death. Trehab and Young People in Recovery are working hard on stigma and education solutions to change the way substance use disorder is viewed in our community. We have found that public awareness rallies have begun to start the conversation in

our communities. We are educating more than just the person with the substance use disorder, we are educating their families as well. We need new ways of thinking on these key barriers to treatment. Interagency collaboration is needed so no one that wants help is turned away. I am part of a volunteer multiagency committee that is dedicated to this very purpose. The Endless Mountains Addiction Awareness Committee or E.M.A.A.C is dedicated to help those who are struggling with addiction and their families. Another new way of thinking is beginning to develop new ideas such as insurance companies investing directly in education and prevention programs. Communities need more public education events that showcase the power of recovery. Sometimes it's as simple as starting the conversation. While attending our county fair I approached two EMTS to express my thanks for everything that they do as first responders. I knew that every basic lifesaving ambulance in our county was now carrying NARCAN or NALOXALONE the lifesaving opioid overdose reversal drug, and wanted to get their opinions on recently obtaining the drug. I asked the EMT'S about how they felt about Narcan. The first of the two responded by saying that he thinks it's wrong that those people can just do as much Heroin as they want now and they can come back to life. He continued saying that those people can get as high as they want and don't have to worry about the consequences. I thanked him again and his female counterpart responded by saying that she was thrilled to have the training and have the drug available. That Narcan had saved her sisters life from a heroin overdose. That her sister is doing great and has her life back. She went on to say her sister is in recovery and how grateful they are for NARCAN and recovery. The first gentleman now had a different story and came face to face with the truth. We exchanged a few more words and the first EMT thanked me. I had done nothing, but began the conversation, we need to have more of these conversations. The EMT referred to people with Substance Use Disorder as those people. He left

the conversation with a new found understanding and a face to Substance Use Disorder. I would propose again that as a solution to all of these barriers I have presented here today that people in recovery themselves be utilized. By putting a face to substance use disorder we can utilize a resource that is now over 24 million strong in this country. We need to implement more peer support alongside existing services through the CRS'S lived experience, strength, and hope we can begin to overcome these barriers. I could have provided many hours of testimony on barriers to treatment. However, in the 10 minutes provided here today I focused on our area's most basic of needs such as transportation, stigma, and education. In conclusion, it is my hope and the hope of all of those at Trehab as well as Young People in Recovery, that individuals that suffer from substance use disorder and mental illness can step from the shadows, and the whispers, to be greeted by an educated, caring, supportive community and receive the treatment services they need. Thank you for permitting my testimony here today. I am living proof that recovery works. Recovery made today possible. Thank You.