

Hello Minnesota Legislators,

My name is Brandy Brink and I am the founder and director of WEcovery, a nonprofit recovery community organization located in Mankato, Minnesota. WEcovery is a grassroots organization that was founded as the result of a need in my community.

Today, I want to tell you more about that work, the unique ways we serve our community, and the broader work of recovery community organizations that is so integral to the culture of recovery across our state.

WEcovery was established in 2016 as a nonprofit organization, and in 2018, we were accredited as an RCO through the Association of Recovery Community Organizations (ARCO).

Our organization provides recovery support services across 20 Southern Minnesota counties. We help fill in gaps of service throughout each of these communities and work across and through many of the systems established by our state. What is unique about our work, and the work of an RCO, is that we are **independent** of these systems and have the ability to work with people regardless of their ability to pay, regardless of where they live in our state, and despite any other program they may or may not be in.

Through our unique structure, we are able to move through systems alongside those we serve.

Our **independence** gives us the ability to experience the system alongside them, often seeing the successes, the failures and the gaps of our current system. As an RCO, we have the independence to fill in the gaps we observe, not recreate them.

For many RCOs in Minnesota, our work is the result of personal investment, both of time and of money, simply because we saw a need in our community and stepped up to meet that need.

This grassroots, peer-based work makes RCOs highly unique, and my organization is here today as the result of **years** of advocacy that has gone before me and made it possible for organizations like mine to grow.

RCOs work in many different settings to remove barriers and support people. For example, we may be introduced to an individual through our local emergency department. Here, we are able to provide recovery support to them in that moment, and also provide long-term peer support services to help them figure out what comes next - like applying for health insurance, getting into residential treatment, developing a long-term plan, and finding recovery housing.

Most importantly, if and when an individual chooses to change service providers, or their service ends, they do not lose the support of an RCO as an independent provider, committed to the *community* and committed to *them*.

Our organization has helped provide a continuum of care in partnership with 245G facilities, social services, schools, employers, jails, EMS systems, hospitals and clinics, probation, housing providers, as well as several other organizations and agencies and the community at large.

RCO's are structured in a way to provide services that are different from these structures. Our work is boots on the ground and embedded in our community. I have valued the flexibility an RCO has and have truly been able to meet those we serve where they are, without constraints.

RCOs meet a distinct, critical, and important need in our community, and I believe the answer is **supporting** the growth of RCOs and the **fidelity** of the RCO model, not diluting the work of an RCO after many of us have fought so hard to be here.

We ask that our Minnesota legislators recognize the work of our organizations, honor the impact we have had across our state amidst a devastating pandemic and opioid crisis, and lean on RCOs for guidance into the process moving forward.

We have invested countless hours into advocacy, teaching our state how organizations like ours can work **together** with the rest of the system, so those recovering have access to all of the recovery support structures Minnesota has to offer.

I am grateful that last year the legislature recognized the importance of recovery community organizations, appropriating monies to be used specifically for organizational structures like mine. I ask that you remember that investment and the work we are doing on a day to day basis to serve our state. We ask that you understand the foundation of what an RCO is and how we work alongside providers and models that have been established long before us, with access to more resources than we have ever had access to.

As one of Minnesota's earliest RCOs, WEcovery is deeply committed to the core values and best practices of RCOs and is grateful to see the number of RCOs growing in our state, now with 17 organizations doing this work.

We ask that you keep the voices of our organizations at the table, that you honor the systems in place that support our work and our many years of advocacy, and finally, that you recognize the best practices currently governing our model ensure the quality of what an RCO is and what it is not, which **increases** stewardship of Minnesota's resources and the fidelity of our services.

Each of us has invaluable experience, and we **must** be at the table for any and all conversations concerning our model and our future in the state of Minnesota.

Thank you.