

Subject: Support for Sober Home Bill SF3973

Sen. Hoffman;

Hello, my name is Aubrey, and I'm a person in long term recovery from stimulant, and opioid use disorder, as well as co-occurring mental health disorders. This is a common introduction made by people in recovery, and it's a statement that means many different things to many different people. To me it isn't a statement about the number of days that I've been sober, but rather a testament to my ongoing and non-linear path in recovery. My path has been both one of success, and for lack of a better word- failure. Failure that was sometimes my own, but also failure that exists within the way we treat people for mental health and substance use disorders.

I've been through countless treatment centers, with countless different policies on medication assisted treatment (MAT), ranging from not allowing anything that is a scheduled substance, to programs where you were permitted to use prescribed medications such as Suboxone, Methadone, Adderall, and medical cannabis. In my experience, when I most recently had access to these medications while in a treatment program I flourished, while taking Suboxone, Vyvanse (a stimulant ADHD medication) and medical cannabis, as prescribed. Furthermore, as these medications helped me regain stability, I decided under my own volition and medical supervision, to stop taking Vyvanse and medical cannabis, simply because I was learning to better manage my ADHD and anxiety symptoms holistically. Some people need to take these medications throughout their life, but I decided I wanted to try and manage some of my conditions without medication, but knowing that they're there if I should need them is comforting.

Today I still take Suboxone to manage my opioid use disorder, and having access to this medication has saved my life, allowing me to stabilize enough to have other disorders managed, and to regain control over my life. I've been able to maintain sobriety, finish two and a half semesters of school, where I'm achieving a bachelor's degree in business. I've held the same job for a year, and was recently offered a promotion, and I've started my business, a licensed micro-bakery. And I've done all of this while using MAT medications, which started by having access to Suboxone, stimulant ADHD medications, and medical cannabis in the beginning of my journey while in treatment and sober houses. Having access to these medications at that time saved my life, and I hope that progress will continue to be made, enabling more programs to implement more person-centered policies around the use of MAT medications.

My testimony is just one of countless examples of the successes people have achieved through having access to MAT medications early on in their recovery journey while in treatment programs and at sober houses. Unfortunately not all programs and sober houses allow access to these life saving medications. It is my fear that if policies restricting MAT access stay in place, that we will continue to have frightening surges in drug related fatalities. And this isn't an issue that's affecting a singular group of people, we've reached a point where it is literally affecting everyone, and isn't bound by class, race, or any other label that differentiates us from one another.

In 2019 I attended a roundtable discussion with the Office of National Drug Policy Control, where a deputy director- a member of the Executive Office of the President of the United States- spoke of losing his son to an opioid overdose. I mention this to iterate how deeply this issue has reached into the very fabric of our society.

I too have lost loved ones to this disease, more than I care to count. And I believe in earnest that one of the primary strategies in reducing the climbing number of overdose deaths is by treating this as a public health crisis, and address it as such with medical intervention in the form of access to the medications that are helping people gain and maintain a stable life free from the use of illicit drugs.

With warm regards,
Aubrey Kjerstenson