



March 5, 2023

Dear Chairwoman Wood,

I'm Gregory Tatro, and I'm a co-founder of Jenna's Promise. You all were so generous with your time a few weeks ago: visiting our campus, observing our work and that of our amazing partners, like Caroline Butler at the Johnson Health Center. Our goal is to work to shift the paradigm of the crisis we have in our state and country regarding substance use. I am excited and honored to be here, to talk about our experiences with this work.

The other day, I was sitting in an ER room, on a snowy, blustery afternoon. The ER was packed, so the rooms were being shared by two patients. Split by a mere curtain, I was sharing the space with a man who had had a terrible ski accident. He was clearly in enough pain that it threw a veil up between himself and the outside world.

And yet, I could hear him arguing on the phone with somebody, as best he could. I saw the nurse walk by, and she was clearly upset. She said, "that man is having one of the worst days of his life, and he has to spend it arguing with an insurance company, to get approval to be treated. What does that say about our society?" To me, after hearing her say that, it seemed a stark, needless, and egregious barrier to someone who clearly needed help.

That man's experience is almost like a compressed microcosm of what it is often like for someone with substance use disorder—needless, callous even, barriers put in place that serve to slow and stymie the path to recovery.

My sister Jenna's experience was one of continual barriers. The system was impossible to navigate, and the obstacles placed in front of her often blocked the way. It would often leave her on the clear path to relapse, even though she wanted to get better. That's why we at Jenna's Promise have devoted ourselves to removing barriers and breaking down silos. It goes with breaking down the barrier of stigma by involving the community, it goes with helping people get back on their feet and following a career path—in other words, helping to get them a safe place to work.

But it also goes with housing, which is why I'm here today. After Jenna would receive inpatient treatment—and this is the case for so, so many—she would often have to return home. Home for her, and for many who are just attaining their first steps into the world of recovery, was rife with triggers and not-so-great friends who were happy to help pull her back to that old life. With others, homelessness would often become their reality. Our housing program is designed to help stop that process—to help provide stable, supportive housing for people newly in recovery.

But even though the residential team at Jenna's Promise are incredible people who do incredible work—we *only have so many beds*. The other reality is: we often have waitlists—people desperate to find a safe place to live. As most of you know, one of the greatest barriers to recovery in this state is housing.

This bill I am testifying about today is in the business that Jenna's Promise is in, is in the same vein as the Johnson Health Center is, and that is to remove barriers. Whether it is with prior authorization, or with naloxone, it helps to accomplish that important goal.

That's certainly the case with Section 6. I know many have already testified on the legal aspects and tenets of this bill, so I view my job as telling the stories of people on the ground. And



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what people need is housing, *desperately*, for people in recovery. Without a safe place to go to, we directly feed the cycle of relapse and overdose. This bill will help remove some of the red tape in the zoning process, allow for faster turnaround time since we are using pre-existing housing. It will help save money too. The end result will be more people in more homes.

I asked a former resident of the Jenna's Promise housing program, a personal hero of mine named Krista Chesebro, what housing meant to her when she first got into recovery. She said, "For me, if I didn't have a *place*...I knew I couldn't go back to my home. I know I would have picked up using again if I went back. I *had* to get out of that area." When I asked her what would have happened if she didn't have recovery housing, she said, "I would be dead. There is no doubt in my mind. Housing saved my life. I had a safe place to work on myself, to not worry about using or about getting beaten up. It was the way for me to begin living my life again."

How many people like Krista have been out there, in desperate need of a home—a *chance*—and *didn't* get that opportunity? How many people didn't get that refuge, and relapsed?

I know most everyone on this committee has seen the memorial wall at Jenna's House. Many of those people, if given a chance, if we removed barriers, could have been a Krista. Instead, they keep silent vigil, pictures tacked to a wall next to my sister.

So I urge you to approve this bill so we can help people in need. It may not be as stark an image as a man between gasps of pain arguing with an insurance company, but I feel the picture is no less urgent. We are holding people up when they are looking to get better. This can be a major step towards a better tomorrow.

Thank you so much.