

Good afternoon, Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. I am **Curtis Kolesky**, I am here today to express concern about Proposed S.B. 666, **An Act Concerning Safe Residential Treatment Facilities for Effective Recovery.**

I first went into treatment for alcohol & drug addiction back in July 2003. At that time I was overwhelmed with suicidal thoughts, no longer employed, had exhausted all of my resources, and had destroyed my credit. In essence I was both morally and financially bankrupt. All of this was a result of my illness.

The first thing that happened to me in treatment was that I was no longer using alcohol and drugs. I was physically going through detoxification. In addition, I was experiencing a wide range of mood swings and was prescribed an antidepressant. I was miserable.

In treatment I learned that I needed to reach out for help. I started to do this in several ways. First, I began to share my emotions with both the clinicians and with my fellow clients in treatment. Almost everyone at my treatment facility seemed to be having the same feelings and struggles that I did. This feeling of camaraderie was extremely beneficial to my early recovery. I began to realize that I was not alone.

When I began to prepare for my life after treatment, I was extremely anxious. I knew that I wanted to stay off of drugs and alcohol, however, I knew that I needed an environment that would be supportive of my intentions. During the later stages of my active addiction, I was despondent, irresponsible and isolated. I did not want to be alone.

Sober housing was proposed as my next step. This would provide me with a place to live as well as with the fellowship of alcoholics and drug addicts in recovery. In addition, it would be a structured environment where I would be assigned house responsibilities and be required to attend twelve step meetings. I would have to learn to live in a communal environment which really was a microcosm of society as a whole. All of this sounded great.

Another proposal was that I find independent housing. This really wasn't realistic. I had no job, no money, and no credit and was really in my infancy as far as reentering society as a responsible and productive contributor. Sober housing was my only feasible alternative.

Finding a Sober House was difficult. There aren't that many of them. Additionally, those that do exist don't always have a bed available. I was fortunate in that I found one and was able to transition from treatment with no interruption.

My experience with Sober Housing has been nothing short of wonderful. At the time I moved in I had literally no assets other than a few articles of clothing. The Sober House furnished me with a bed and a kitchen with all of the utensils I needed to prepare my meals. I was also able to move in with very little money. I didn't have to come up with a

months rent and a security deposit. I only needed my first weeks rent. In addition, I felt welcome. I was surrounded by fellow addicts and alcoholics all in early recovery. Several of the residents were also from the same treatment facility I went to. I was not alone.

Over time I was able to find employment. I began to regain my understanding of responsibility that I had lost during the later stages of my active addiction. I began to realize that the world didn't revolve around my needs and desires. The Sober House I was in made me realize that I am a small member of something bigger. When I arrived, my housemates reached out and helped me, physically, financially and emotionally. As the weeks went by, I found that I did the same for the new people arriving at the house. I slowly began to be more of a contributor and less of a consumer.

I have been living in a Sober House for quite some time. Initially it was my only option. Today I have many more options available to me. I continue to live in a Sober House because I believe it enhances my life in recovery. It helps me to keep the focus off of myself and place it on others. When a newcomer arrives it reminds me of what I used to be like. To me there is nothing more rewarding than helping someone in their early recovery. When I first arrived in a Sober House, the greatest gift I received was often just being able to watch a movie, share a meal and see other people trying to change their lives. The people in the house before me provided me with that hope. I feel it is my obligation to pass that along. Sober Housing allows me to accomplish that.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on this extremely important issue. **Please do not put in place a statute that may well jeopardize access to housing for persons who are striving to recover their lives and become productive members of society. Please consider working with DMHAS and the recovery community to accommodate community needs."**