

Jody Rowell, OHCA delivering testimony for Kelli Belardi

I know I only have 3 minutes to share my experience. I have never felt so alone in my quest for help.

This last year and a half has been the toughest fight of my life, and it is for my son. What started as behavior issues turned into drug use that became so out of control, I feared for his life. I contacted the Anthem Behavioral Health Hotline twice to ask if they covered inpatient mental health/substance abuse treatment. They said yes and gave me the name of a facility. I brought him there only to find out that in fact, insurance would not cover it. I was able to pay for one month of treatment which cost \$22,500. That was my son's entire college fund. I did not know what else to do. He had already been on medication and had been in therapy for almost a year prior to me bringing him there. Nobody can know how bad it was unless they were there.

The program was a three month program but I could only afford to keep him there for one month. He came home and unfortunately things became much, much worse despite continued in home therapy. I can only say this has been a parent's worst nightmare and an eye opener to the problems and lack of help available for parents with children in the same situation. If my son had been diagnosed with cancer, there would be a plan and insurance would pay.

My son was on probation at the time and due to my prompting and failed drug tests among other violations, they took him to detention on March 16. I am lucky he made it there alive. He was placed into a drug program and was discharged from there due to behavior issues. He still sits in detention today, costing the state money.

Now, because of conflicting reports from the court psychiatrist and other court professionals, they are thinking of sending him home with even less in place than what he had before. He still has not received the help he so needs. At times, he continues to use self injury to cope and I am scared to death that he will turn to drugs or self harm again to cope.

I have not been a bad parent and have always been there for both of my sons. I have given him every opportunity to thrive. It is clear that when there is a mental health issue involved, it doesn't matter. What I have learned is that you either have to be rich or poor to get help. I have worked for over 20 years, have always had health insurance for my children and have never abused it. Then when I need it the most, I get denied. Nobody knows my son like me and nobody can possibly know what we have been through unless you were there.

I could go on for hours. If anyone wishes to speak with me, I am available. Thank you.

Kelli Belardi, mother