

Ana M. Gopoiian

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St. Of Ct. General Assembly

Testimony and support of Bills No. 5371,5372,5373,5374

Hello, my name is Ana M. Gopoiian, I'd like to thank you all for being here and giving me the opportunity to give testimony in support of the bills listed above. I grew up in this town Wallingford, CT. baptized, first communion, confirmation and elementary school, junior high, a couple of attempts at high school, alternative school and adult education night school, my family was comprised of two good hard working families, my parents were children having children. I'm now 50, a tax payer, a register voter, a home owner, and last but not least a woman in long term recovery.

I am here in support and also working with CTYF (Connecticut Turning to Youth and Families), The Coalition for a Better Wallingford and new on my path, Crossroads from Wolcott, CT. I believe it is these grassroots organizations that will help support the intentions of these bills and help to serve the young adults, adolescence and their families collaboratively. We are the front line soldiers and we need funds and resources to strengthen the paths to successful treatment, aftercare, housing and education within our state and our communities.

As a woman in long term recovery I've seen our systems dwindle down to nothing over the past 18 ½ years. I had available to me 18 ½ years ago 17 days treatment inpatient and two weeks of an outpatient relapse prevention program I begged for. I was high for 20 years and I couldn't get more time, more support, I didn't have information and my family dynamics were challenged at best. I couldn't get more than the 17 days, but I could discharge, get high and if I lived through it come back for 17 more days the next day. At this time I also worked for the insurance company that carried my insurance plan.

Fast forward 18 ½ years later, IT'S WORSE, really bad! If you're lucky to get into detox it's mostly 3-5 days only to be turned out to the streets after you've stabilized. The possibility of being farmed out of state with no real reentry plan to your community might be an option if you have insurance. If you a hard working family with insurance you're actually so limited that the out of pocket costs are crippling. I have been in position to desperately suggest a parent to drop their young adult children from their insurance because there were more services available to their children. I've taken desperate addicts to get high or higher to qualify entry to treatment; one person openly said they were going to kill themselves just so they had a safe place to be and one facility told an addict strung out on cocaine that it wasn't addictive.

I believe these bills will get the changes needed started in the right direction, helpful in so many ways, affecting so many people. We really need to look at what is already in place in our systems and collaborate, not waste valuable resources and TIME reinventing what so many of us know we need. TIME is wasting, people are dying. If Wallingford alone lost 53 people over the last 3 years to drugs, most of those young adults and it takes three years to line up the powers to be to pass a bill, try wrapping around the reality of 53 people times the number of towns in our state over the next three years...

Many will die or continue to suffer and attached to each one of those people are their families, there needs to be complete care, care that not only treats the person needing recovery but recovery for the families too. Recovery only starts in treatment, it has greater success and it can be sustained when it has the support as any other disease would have.

- Peer to peer support, people with lived experiences and places to share it, including schools, community centers, recovery clubs
- Safe and available treatment in state that is age and gender specific
- Programs that bring into consideration the families and their need for recovery also
- Safe residential programs that are regulated, gender and age specific
- Education on topic and programs in schools with availability in our communities that can also nurture communication skills, life skills, work ethics, integrity, and job opportunities

So even though I had many privileges as seen by society in our small town there were many secrets, and stigmas that assisted in keeping the shame, guilt and disease in control. My mom has a year and a month less clean time than me and I know she has her own pain and story to heal from. At the age of six I had a trauma that had no vocabulary, I felt different and alone, I experimented with alcohol and cigarettes, at 12 I was using other drugs, by the end of junior high I was selling drugs, hanging out with a subculture of like minds. By 16 I was already pregnant once and by 17 I was no longer welcome in my home. I wondered for a while, lived in a car I borrowed and never brought back and tangled with a motorcycle club. I called a 12 step helpline at the age of 23 but never showed up and suffered for 9 more years. By the time I made it to treatment I was 32 years old, I jockeyed many different drugs over time, I had been pregnant four times and I was hopeless. I did acquire a GED along the line but struggled with learning disabilities and reading. There is much more to this story, but I'm no longer a victim of it, I'm a survivor.

I am a responsible productive member of society that lives in the solution today. I am a state certified RSS (Recovery Support Specialist) and I co-facilitate a group for parents of children that are in active addiction or active recovery for The Coalition for a Better Wallingford. I am the first one in my immediate family to graduate college and now have a BA in Social Science, and just recently completed a state certification to be a Hypnotherapist. I believe my path is full of people supporting, guiding and serving a greater good. The disease of addiction has no prejudice; no matter of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion, or lack of religion, it has no mercy. I believe there is a movement happening though, a movement that will help to break the stigma of the disease of addiction in society and have healthcare and the systems supporting it come together and treat this disease as a disease.

Thank you for your time, thank you for your service and I look forward to continued change on these topics.

Sincerely,

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