

TO: The House Republican Policy Committee

Oct. 21, 2002, 14 years ago, at the age of 16, my son took his first opioid. He became addicted. It was easy - he had a neck brace and prescriptions - Percocet and Vicodin. For seven years, he hid his addiction. Then one day, he tells me he is trying to get into a methadone clinic. He was addicted to opiates and couldn't stop. The few doctors that could give suboxone could take no new patients. Never in my wildest nightmare, did I realize what that night in the hospital had done. I was now on a lonely, fearful, heartbreaking, terrifying roller coaster ride. My son and I experienced firsthand the many broken steps of the system.

Enter the criminal justice system; two pounds of pot, my son became a felon. Released on \$3500.00 bail, he came to my house to detox. Three days of hell, followed by a day of feeling better, followed by two nights of hallucinations. Told he must go to rehab. After many calls, I drove him to his first rehab on a Sunday afternoon. By Monday, night, he is in ICU with his organs shutting down. The rehab facility was not equipped to deal with detoxing, took him to the hospital. When he became agitated the hospital gave him a shot of haloperidol, he had a reaction to it. 3 days in ICU, 2 days of monitoring his kidneys and heart, he is back home with me, looking for another rehab facility. We were lucky, we got him into one 2 hours from home, in a mountain setting, more his style. Day 5, the facility calls me; the insurance wants him to be released. The facility fights with the insurance company every day and gets him 5 more days. That's it, the insurance company says send him home. The facility gave him another 5 days free because he was doing so well. 15 days total in rehab. Followed up with 90 days in the work release program in jail. Parole for 5 years. Two and a half years clean, he gets drunk one night, walks into the wrong house – cold, confused, non-violent. Incarcerated for 90 days, no work release, and loss of street time on his parole. He starts all over in getting his life back.

He is doing well today. He works a lot. He just wants it all behind him. He is a fighter, a survivor, a good man, he will get past this, despite the road blocks he is thrown and the broken steps he has stumbled upon.

I will get past this. I have chosen to get involved, to make a difference. I look into my 6 year old grandson's eyes and know we have to fight to make his world safer more compassionate, tolerant as he grows up. The system is broken, the stigma, silence and shame has to stop. Addiction is a health issue, not a criminal issue. On the average 129 people a day die in the United States from an overdose.

Penny Conway
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TO: The House Republican Policy Committee

My son started using heroin after he cut his hand and required to surgeries to fix the tendons and he was given pain medication at the time he had a girlfriend, an apartment and a car he was doing very good for himself. Then the surgeries and he was hooked. When the pain medication was gone he found heroin, and he became a different person, he lost the car, the apartment, the girl.

Over the years he has been in a few different rehabs but never for long, he had medical assistance had they only paid for 7-10 days, barley long enough to detox. There are so many people that need to be in rehab. It's like a revolving door; they are not there long enough to get the tools they need to change their lives. They are there just long enough to detox and they go back out in the world with nothing really changing.

My son stole things from my house, was arrested for retail theft and drug paraphernalia, he had fines to pay so the state will not help you if you owe fines, he couldn't pay the fines so they suspended his driver's license, he was essentially homeless with no job no way to drive himself to a job and with no money to live day to day, it is a circle that keeps going round and round and they need to be given a chance to learn how to be NORMAL again and that takes time and counseling.

When he was trying to go to a rehab he would call and ask for a bed and they will put him on a list and tell him to call back every morning at 7 a.m. and he would call every day but sometimes it takes weeks to get in and that is time that they don't have they are in danger of dying every single day. He did not want to be an addict. He told me many times that he just wanted to be normal again and he didn't know how to be normal. I even had him picked up on a 302 warrant and I thought that he would have to talk to a counselor but no doctor ever came to see him and he went through Detox with no medication and when I finally got to see him he was very weak and sick and it was all for nothing. No one ever tried to help him there.

My son was a loving person he loved his family and his baby to be that will be born in September and it is a horrible tragedy that he will never get to see his son. We need more rehabs and more time in rehabs and counseling, these people need our help they are not throw away people they are great people that lost their way.

In loving memory of James Adam Lack 11/8/82- 4/29/16

Leona Murphy
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TO: House Republican Policy Committee

I am writing this letter regarding my son who is addicted to drugs.

He is a non-violent drug addict who has received minimal treatment due to lack of insurance.

He is currently incarcerated which has a major impact financially and emotionally on his family.

He has been incarcerated several times and it does not help. I think our legislators need to realize that this is a disease, not a crime,

I think laws need to be made to provide them help not punish them.

Punishment for my son obviously does not work.

Incarceration does not deter him from taking drugs when released..

Maybe if my son received court assigned treatment, was able to continue to work to provide for his family, he would have a better chance to succeed in life in lieu of sitting in a jail cell receiving no help.

I appreciate any consideration regarding this matter for all non-violent drug addicts who are suffering for lack of receiving adequate treatment.

Sincerely,

Maria Rooney
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TO: PA Legislators and the House
Republican Policy Committee
FROM: Lauren H., East Norriton, PA
LaurenRH08@gmail.com

I am an addict named Lauren H. My first stay in an inpatient drug rehab was at Eagleville Hospital, Eagleville, PA in February 2011. The only reason I was able to get a bed was because I was in a program related to Montgomery County Probation, called Drug Court.

The evaluators pushed for either Medicaid funded or County funded. I eventually got approved for Medicaid, because I was not working and had no income, so Keystone First approved 5 days of detox and 22 days of treatment.

That was the first of MANY treatment centers and detoxes to come. From 2011 to about 2014, I was probably in about a dozen rehabs and 5 Detox's.

Yes, I am a heroin user. I got addicted to pain killers when I was 17 years old after a bad car accident I was in. The doctor at the ER prescribed oxycodone and I fell in love in the worst way!! My life has been a rollercoaster ever since.

Many, many times I have walked into a rehab or called the rehab, asking for help, for a bed; and all they would say was "We have no beds available." Over and over and over again. OR I would get approved for five day detox; just to get out in five days and still be withdrawing and in pain so I would run back to the drugs, because I knew no other way.

Addicts & Alcoholics are no different than anyone else. We are your Mother or Father, your Daughter, Son, Nephew, Cousin, Aunt, Uncle, Wife or Husband!!!!

PLEASE help us fight this vicious disease! Please!!!!!!!!!!!! I've lost over a dozen Great Friends & Family from addiction in the past two years!!

We need HELP! We want HELP! It seems insurance or rehabs or our own government just cares about money! These are OUR PEOPLE!

Citizens of the United States of America!!!! We are no different from people who have Cancer; PTSD, & other mental health issues!

I had always thought calling my addiction a "disease" was a cop out. But until I learned many, many things about Addiction and the reasons I use and when I use, & being in and out of jails and rehabs for years, & being a part of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous: I've learned that sometimes I just use because that's all my brain knows!!!! We literally need to RE*TRAIIn our brains, as addicts and alcoholics.

Please think about longer treatment coverage and maybe even MORE treatment centers and MORE detoxes.

Now it is July 2016, and I have been on suboxone maintenance since December 2014. It has helped keep me off the streets and it has helped me regain a relationship with my family, as well as be a MOTHER again to my 11mo old twin baby boys; a better Mother to my 10 year old son, a better daughter, sister, niece.

This is a pretty vague description of my addiction testimony; but the point is, we need more treatment options so this opioid epidemic can come to an end!!! I really hope and pray we can get to that point as a country!

Thanks for Listening!

GOD BLESS!

House Republican policy Committee,

I am writing this because of this horrible epidemic that is attacking not only our area but the whole country. As parents we try to teach our children right from wrong with the hopes that we can instill good morals and decision making skills in them. Unfortunately peer pressure and possibly genetics take over causing a parent's worst nightmare. It is so hard to watch your child spiral out of control due to an addiction. It is like they turn into a totally different person, one that you do not know, one that you can't trust who will lie, cheat, and steal from any one thus including their only family. They will do anything to fuel their addiction; I never dreamed that one of my boys would even think of putting a needle in his arm. It is heart breaking and stressful not knowing if your child is laying somewhere dead due to an overdose or bad drug deal.

My family and I have fought with my son physically and verbally trying to get through to him. I had my own child 302'd and sent to mental health facility due to the string of events that occurred from the abuse of medication. The fact that he was over the age of 18 he was only kept in the facility for a total of three days prior to his release. He was good for a week or two and then started again and eventually he could not afford pills and turned to heroin. He has used every excuse under the sun to justify his drug use even the death of his little brother who was killed in a drunk driving crash four years ago. He knows and I know that his brother would not want this for him.

I unknowingly took him to a methadone clinic trying to save his life he was then addicted to the methadone that was playing hell on his body. Those clinics are not there to help people they are there to make money on their misfortune. He was paying \$100.00 a week to go there every morning and get his fix. Instead of slowly decreasing your dosage they continually raise it saying that you aren't on a stable dose. I have seen people stagger in there because they are high and they are still given their methadone these clinics are nothing but legal drug houses.

I could not stand watching my son's body deteriorate any longer and talked him in to going to rehab. I called our insurance company, CIGNA, and was told to send him to Florida and it would be covered 100 percent just to find out after he was discharged after only 30 days and that we now owe tens of thousands of dollars. For one thing I do not believe that 30 days is long enough, for another they tell them to expect relapse and not to beat yourself up over it. The sad part is that one relapse is all it takes to kill you. My son has relapsed at least three times that I know of and is now taking suboxone that he buys off the street. Yes, it keeps him off the heroin but to me it is trading one addiction for another.

There has to be a way of helping not only my son but thousands of others that I'm sure are fighting the same battle. Drugs are everywhere and way too easy to get and I'm sure to the ones fighting addiction it is easier to stay on drugs than it is to get help. Heroin is cheap just 8 to 10 bucks a stamp bag. Even the ones that want to get clean need help, they become so sick during withdraw that they need to be medically supervised. Most can't stand the sickness and just start using again. I know if my son

wasn't in rehab at the time I sent him to get off the methadone he would have went out and used. He had seizures coming off the methadone it is worse than heroin, it takes longer it took 18 days for him to withdraw from the methadone and only 6 days for the people coming off heroin.

I really do not know what the answer is, stricter sentences for these horrible dealers who are ruining families and taking our children from us. maybe laws or guide lines for our insurance companies we pay thousands of dollars a year to have insurance that doesn't cover hardly anything yet we have to have insurance. This epidemic is just getting worse and worse it isn't just the young ones anymore there are people of all ages, races and economic classes losing everything to addiction. We can't sweep this under the rug; we must do something to help fight this battle.

It is hard as a parent to start grieving for a child that is still with us because you know in your heart that his demons are going to one day win. I fight every day to keep my boy alive after losing one I would not be able to go on with my own life if I lost another. Please help not only me but all the other mothers out there fighting with me.

Respectfully,

Susuan Lysell

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To the House Republican Policy Committee:

My son Mathew was addicted to OxyContin. Our first experience with seeking treatment was in 2003. Matthew was seen by Dr. James C. Berman, who at that time was considered to be one of America's foremost authorities on the disease of addiction, and he had previously been the Chief of Staff of the Caron Foundation.

Dr. Berman led us to believe that Matthew could control his addiction on his own. For years, my son attempted to do just that until 2007 when the original formulation of OxyContin was no longer available. He then turned to alternative opiate painkillers which were not the answer to controlling his addiction. This led him to heroin.

The first, and only, rehab experience for Matthew was not until July 2014. He believed that if he went to rehab and failed to overcome his addiction, he would die. At the time, he was correct. He did not have insurance and we paid for his 30 days of treatment with a credit card. My son had gotten a DUI the previous fall in Delaware County and knew that a jail sentence could also be his death sentence. He agreed to go to rehab in hopes of both healing his disease.

Unfortunately, the county did not offer any help or support and decided that once Matthew had completed his 30 days of rehab, he would have to serve the weekend jail time as well. Even though we pleaded with the court to allow additional treatment time and explained that Matthew had been given prescription drugs by other inmates in jail, the court chose to send him back to jail. My son died on a Sunday night after serving his 5th weekend in jail.

If Matthew had gotten the DUI in Montgomery County instead of Delaware County, at that time, the consequences would likely have been very different and my son might still be alive. In Montgomery County he could have received treatment at a methadone clinic prior to sentencing, 90 days of rehab, jail time, probation, and periodic drug testing. In other words, he might have had a chance. I know this because a neighborhood friend of Matthew was given these treatments/consequences and is alive and sober today. I am hoping and praying that all people who suffer from this man-made epidemic will have access to this model of care. Thank you for now taking a harder look at the opioid crisis. I deeply regret that in 2010 information provided to the White House did not spur our leaders to nip what Purdue Pharma created in the bud or hold them accountable for loss of human lives.

Sincerely,

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To the House Republican Policy Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to speak about the addiction problem facing our family. My son Anthony has had an addiction problem since he just 13. He started out with drinking, then pot, then came the pills, and then on to heroin and crack.

As a Parent I know that I'm not alone when I say this is a real nightmare. My son in his early addiction was able to get help and was in a 9 month program. He did well for a few years then that evil crept back into his life. Since then trying to get him long term care is impossible. You're told there are no beds available, try back another day, or your Insurance is denying you coverage for rehab they will only cover a 5 day detox. For an addict that is just a band aid.

To give them just 5 days is in no way helping through this disease. I have spoken to a counselor that was on my son's case when he was admitted and begged for them to keep him because sending him out for IOP isn't going to help him. He needs in-house rehab counseling, therapy and probably medication. A lot of addicts suffer from Bipolar disorder which requires medical attention.

When will they understand the strain and heartache this has on families? We cannot do this without professionals giving them the medical attention they need and want. Just recently my son went to seek help and was told again they will only give him 5 days of detox and now he is back on the streets using again.

This is a serious epidemic facing so many families I pray that someone will do the right thing and give these souls the help they need to find Life again not the Hell they are living now. I am in such fear for my son that it will be too late and my innocent grandson will never know the man his father could have been if he had the proper medical attention he needed.

God Bless and Thank you.

Mrs Janet McMorrow
2849 Aramingo Ave
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To the House Republican Policy Committee:

On August 29th, my son will turn 31; he will spend it in Montgomery County Corrections Facility.

On August 29th 2015, my son turned 30 in Chester County Correction Facility.

For well over two years my son has been in a serious relapse of his heroin addiction. Between 2014, 2015, and now 2016, he has been in and out of at least 20 rehabs. Not an exaggeration.

Okay, so you say, he was in rehab? Why is he now in jail? Because of the 20 times (or more) he has been in rehab, they never kept him long enough but to detox him. He would sleep in the parking lots waiting for a bed calling me up crying because he was so desperate. They would then take him in and detox him and because of insurance, they would release him. Detox is only about 8 days, sometimes 5 days. Time and time and time and time again. They would release him the VERY day they took him off the detox medication and open the doors and say Good Luck!! I was petrified that someday I would receive the call that he was dead. I avoided the phone. I unhooked my land line. My avoidance was so great.

Going through that he could not keep a job. He was not allowed to live at home because of tough love. Well he had to find money for his drugs somehow and he committed burglaries.

So they say a heroin addict either ends up in jail or ends up dead. So luckily he is in jail. But if he would have gotten a good long term rehab that would have helped him, he would not be in jail. He has sat this 2nd time for 6 months, still awaiting sentencing.

But he isn't getting treatment, counseling, physiological treatment. Yes he is clean and thinking about what he will do now and swears he is never going to use again. But he has not had treatment!! If the county can pay for his jail, why won't they pay for counseling!??

I want my son alive and well, I don't want my son in jail. I don't want him to be a heroin addict. We desperately searched for help.

So I guess I should be glad it was jail and not dead. . .

Regards,

Carol Brightbill
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August 1, 2016

Attention: House Republican Policy Committee

Dear Legislators,

I am writing to you today regarding the growing drug problem in our neighborhoods and country.

Unfortunately, this issue has affected my family on a personal level. When I tried to get help through the appropriate channels, I was met with obstacle after obstacle. For the purposes of clarity, I have listed some of the issues I was confronted with below:

1. Finding a doctor;
 - a. that is covered by your insurance and affordable
 - i. I even checked into using out-of-network doctors, but the cost was exorbitant.
 - b. that will even return your phone call
 - c. is accepting new patients
 - d. that specializes in the age/gender and specific addiction of the person seeking help
 - e. where you can get an appointment with six months
 - i. I even reached out to my primary doctor in the hopes they could refer me to someone who could help, but even their contacts were unresponsive.
2. Went to the local emergency room;
 - a. Finding a bed in a local facility where your insurance is accepted
3. Another problem I ran into is when my family member was in recovery and had to go to the emergency room for a work related injury, he told the doctor that he was in recovery, yet what did that doctor prescribe for pain medication?, the very drug that he was recovering from! Really!

I was unable to make any head way with the above measures, so the only help I could get was with a pain management doctor, who may or may not be the best alternative but it was the only doctor that responded to my urgent plea. I was frustrated, upset, emotional and tired of trying to get assistance and I was not the one who needed help. Imagine being a user and trying to navigate this system. No wonder many of them either don't try to get clean, relapse, or die. They're not strong enough to fight the bureaucratic red tape.

More and more I feel like the current policies in place are more about the money rather than helping those afflicted with this illness. We need more doctors, trained specialists,

and facilities both in-patient and out-patient that when someone is in need and reaching out our reply is not, "I'll see you in 6 months", or "write me a check for \$350 and I'll see you for a consultation". If someone is crying out for help, we need to strike while the iron is hot. Also, in-patient services do not work for everyone. If they have good jobs and are either afraid of losing their job or worried about the stigma they will face from management or co-workers by going in-patient, more out-patient options should be available. This way they can keep busy by working and being productive members of society while still receiving counseling and support.

I know this can be done; we just have to work together. Other diseases like polio, smallpox and many others that plagued our people in the past have been cured. We just have to treat addiction for what is truly is a disease.

Please let's stop this epidemic and work together to end the suffering.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Margie Gaffner
1297 Morgan Horse Drive
Warrington, PA 18976

Dear Republican House Policy Committee,

On June 10th, 2015, my husband overdosed on heroin in Pittsburgh, PA. By the grace of God and emergency workers, he was saved with Narcan and transported to a local hospital. It was there that we found out that he had serious addiction issues. Although I had suspected alcohol issues, I didn't know about the heroin. He received medical treatment and a brief meeting with a social worker. He was dismissed two hours later; only leaving with pamphlets for local AA meetings.

It was a disgrace that a social worker didn't help us navigate what to do next during our family crisis. We immediately left for Gateway Treatment Center, and were told it was full. The next two days were filled with being told that insurance didn't cover certain places or places didn't have a bed to detox. We saw a treatment place online- Transformation Treatment Center in Delray Beach. The next day he left for Florida. He spent two months there-one for inpatient and one in half way house. During that time, he felt supported within the area. When he came home, we had to pay out of pocket for him to attend Greenbrier treatment outpatient for eight weeks. He has been clean for 13 months by the grace of God.

This entire process was very overwhelming and I can estimate it costed about \$18,000 out of pocket and that is with insurance coverage. I rarely tell our experience and continue to struggle with the stigma of addiction in my family; however, I felt like I needed to tell you so perhaps the system can change. We were the lucky ones; my husband wanted the help and we could afford it. It shouldn't be about luck and being able to afford it. This epidemic is hitting everyone and it needs a better system to work. Here are my thoughts that I think should be considered:

- 1) more outpatient treatment centers that offer information on treatment; so many people want to stop but don't know how.
- 2) Hospitals shouldn't release overdoses so quickly. We need to start treating it more seriously.
- 3) Social workers should be more involved in the process. I don't know what someone would do if they didn't have family to help.
- 4) more inpatient and detox centers in the Pgh area. Waiting could cost someone their life.
- 5) more half way houses that are supported by local communities so people don't have to return to situations that would make them use again at home.
- 6) insurance coverage for treatment for everyone. Including family treatment and counseling since it becomes a family disease.

7) more education for students about this disease.

My biggest fear is that my sons will have to face this as well.

Thank you for reading my story.

God Bless.

Chelsea Wright

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