

**HOUSE FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE  
HOUSING AND INSURANCE SUBCOMMITTEE**

TESTIMONY OF JEROD M. THOMAS, CEO  
SHEPHERD'S HOUSE, INC.  
LONG-TERM TRANSITIONAL RECOVERY RESIDENCE FOR MEN

***"The Role of Federal Housing and Community Development Programs  
To Support Opioid and Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery"***

AUGUST 16, 2018

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE HOUSING AND INSURANCE SUBCOMMITTEE,  
CONGRESSMAN BARR, CHAIRMAN DUFFY, AND ESTEEMED GUESTS:**

There's a saying in recovery that "The Only Thing that Has to Change is Everything."

At the Shepherd's House, we're in the business of helping drug addicts and alcoholics change everything about their lives, over the course of 18-24 months. We are a whole-person, holistic model. Our treatment is multi-dimensional because life is multi-dimensional. The only life that is one-dimensional is that of the man in active addiction whose only need is to feed his heroin or alcohol addiction. That lifestyle must be unlearned.

Our primary focus is the business of recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. But we know, after nearly 30 years of providing long-term transitional recovery residences in Central Kentucky, that long-term sustained sobriety is heavily reliant upon living in a safe, drug-free home, and learning daily living skills. It's a result of learning how to live and how to make choices -- on a daily basis -- in a way that doesn't cause harm to us or to others, but instead promotes and uplifts others, and as a result, ourselves. We learn self-support by supporting others.

These facilities are not sober living houses where there is only a roof overhead, but no actual treatment. They are Transitional Housing for Recovery and provide recovery care and treatment 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. What our facilities offer is rare. But as you will hear today, they are proven methods of treatment with quantifiable data supporting their efficacy.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SECTION 8 VOUCHERS  
FOR SAFE TRANSITIONAL HOUSING**

While the Shepherd's House doesn't currently use Section 8 vouchers, we do administer Federal Home Loan Bank funds and Kentucky Housing Corporation funds which require income and special needs verifications which are quite similar to the Section 8 rental assistance voucher program in the THRIVE Act. The Shepherd's House and other similar models have essentially adopted the tenets of Section 8 housing, but with additional restrictions. Under our transitional housing models clients pay a portion of their income as rent, and the rest is subsidized by the non-profit support the

Shepherd's House receives. Like Section 8, you are required to remain drug and alcohol free and commit no crimes. But unlike section 8, you are residing in a 24-hour a day / 7-day a week therapeutic community where you are accountable for your lifestyle, your choices, and your self-care. The additional requirements for employment, workforce training, counseling, therapy, recovery, home management and maintenance, etc., are MANDATORY for continued residence.

The significance of the THRIVE Act funding is that THRIVE-modeled facilities will be able to expand their client bases and offer more services to more individuals. There will be a significant reduction of the housing costs burden on the facilities and these funds will be freed up for more services and expanded facilities. Since most of the clients served are either income-eligible for Section 8 or qualify as "homeless," the resources are not misappropriated and will serve the double duty of providing housing and subsidizing treatment. It is a smart and efficient use of funds.

With regard to life skills, many clients come to recovery from diverse backgrounds where self-care and daily living skills weren't emphasized. Perhaps our family of origin was not a family that created a budget, paid bills on time, developed good parenting skills, or learned how to resolve conflicts in a healthy way. The Shepherd's House, and the model outlined in the THRIVE ACT gives addicts and alcoholics a second chance at learning healthy living tools. Our clients learn skills that teach them how to live within the rules, within the laws, in society and in sobriety. These are the collateral supports of sustained recovery.

In addition to our primary goal of learning to live sober, the Thrive and Career Acts support a complete recovery program. Some of the trainings under the Shepherd's House include:

1. Education: Completing a GED; applying for technical schools or trade and vocational schools; attending or finishing undergraduate degrees; helping clients find opportunities for financial assistance and teaching them how to apply for it.
2. Writing resumes and learning interviewing skills;
3. Understanding how to be a good employee, including accountability and consequences when there is under-performance, or a job is lost;
4. Creating a personal budget, sticking to it, and paying bills in a timely manner;
5. Appreciating the personal, legal, and moral obligations of paying child support and becoming current on all outstanding child support obligations, and paying all court costs and fines before graduating from the program;
6. Understanding the impact of drugs and alcohol on one's family and learning how to repair those relationships that can be supportive and healthy;
7. Learning what healthy relationships look like through therapy and group work and removing oneself from toxic relationships and households;
8. Learning healthy parenting skills and reunifying families; and
9. Improving conflict management including how to resolve conflicts without emotional or physical harm.

We know through experience and real-life examples that it is virtually impossible to sustain sobriety when daily living skills are lacking; when a person can't find or maintain

employment; and where there is no safe housing. The challenges of daily living -- when the client has no skills to conquer these problems and when they are in a destructive living environment -- will inevitably lead back to active addiction. Independence acquired as a result of living in stable residences and maintaining stable employment is how the client will THRIVE.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOB TRAINING FOR THE RECOVERING PERSON**

The partnerships with employers which are fostered by the staff at the Shepherd's House and are supported in the CAREER Act allow our clients to work in safe and sober environments, foster mentoring relationships, and provide opportunities for advancement.

The Commonwealth of Kentucky, with our skyrocketing addiction and unemployment rates, is the perfect state for inclusion as one of the five states to be selected in the CAREER Act Pilot program. Facilities like ours have already generated statistics that the CAREER Act Pilot Program require, but in a non-funded setting. We can provide statistics for funded vs. non-funded programs through comparison of new data to our existing data.

When the addict or alcoholic finally makes it to treatment, there is a universal brokenness. The hopes and dreams of yesterday have been crushed under the heavy shackles of addiction. Ambitions have been lost and the promise of a brighter future is as elusive as the freedom from addiction they are seeking.

The THRIVE Act, and the facilities that follow that model, have the time and resources to nurture the clients back to life. Within their therapeutic community they learn, one day at a time, that good things will come to those who stay sober. They witness the metamorphosis of recovery in their peers as they live and grow together in a safe home. Often this is the first safe home the client has ever had.

TIME is the recovering person's ally. We understand that a safe and nurturing living environment -- for 18-24 months -- is critical if the recovering person is to set about cleaning up the wreckage of their past so that they can move forward with their head held high, meeting the new challenges a sober life presents.

The THRIVE Program and the CAREER Act provide precisely the foundation for sustained recovery that we have seen succeed time and again at Shepherd's House.

Our programs are abstinence based. Unfortunately, as advocates for abstinence-based recovery, we have watched millions and millions of dollars be distributed for medically assisted treatment within the state. Based upon our treatment model, we were and will remain ineligible for this funding. And yet we can boast success rates of our clients after graduating from long-term residential recovery residences that far exceeds those for individuals who only rely on one-dimensional treatment (in this instance, MAT) and are not provided with additional modalities like recovery programs, job training, employment assistance, or stable housing.

We have also been ineligible for the millions of dollars that have been distributed to programs directed to mothers and pregnant women. In no way do we believe these funds for mothers programs are misappropriated. These programs are critical. But everyone deserves the chance to live sober. The massive distribution of funds excludes the type of programs THRIVE supports to non-mothers and others in abstinence-based treatment. There must also be adequate funding for those who have, quite frankly, fallen through the cracks. For the forgettables. For the men and women who want to learn to live sober, but who have no other options; who don't qualify for other government-funded programs. And so for those of us who know that a multi-faceted holistic model is a model of hope, we eagerly support these Acts.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIMITED EXPANSION OF SECTION 8 VOUCHERS PROGRAM FOR GRADUATES OF THRIVE-BASED TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAMS**

The THRIVE Act's Section 8 voucher program for transitional housing establishes rules for eligibility. The program excludes individuals with drug or alcohol addictions, or a history of criminal conduct from eligibility. As such, currently the recovering drug addict or alcoholic is not eligible for section 8 vouchers for safe and affordable housing *after release* from a transitional housing residence. The individual may be relegated to returning to destructive living environments.

Attendant to the THRIVE Act, I recommend an expansion of the Section 8 eligibility be carved out specifically for those drug addicts and/or alcoholics (with or without criminal histories) who are graduates of a THRIVE-based program. The client would be deemed eligible for Section 8 housing for a defined period of time upon completion of a THRIVE-based program. For example, upon completion of an 18-24 month transitional housing program, the graduate is entitled to apply for Section 8 vouchers for safe and affordable housing for a period of 12-60 months. The goal would be for the client to transition from the voucher program within 1 to 5 years, when employment is achieved that provides adequate income for safe and affordable housing outside of the subsidy.

The hope is that a person who graduates from a transitional housing program, who has remained sober; who has gotten his or her life back on track; who has maintained long-term employment; who has learned how to pay bills and keep child support current, that because of this person's success, that they would be able to obtain safe and affordable housing where drugs and alcohol are not acceptable. This further supports their continued recovery and provides the accountability they have come to rely upon. It is yet another form of treatment through continued accountability

### **IN CONCLUSION**

The THRIVE-based model, including existing facilities like the Shepherd's House, have proven results of long-term sobriety. But we are one small program in a sea of addiction. Replicating this Model will be a game-changer. It is sound and is the best and most successful tool not just for separating the addict from the drug; but for giving the addict an opportunity for a new life. There are simply not enough of them and so this funding is critical. The Programs will save lives.

At some level, the Shepherd's House and similar models have been undertaking and accomplishing the goals of the CAREER and THRIVE acts since 1989. The difference is that we are facilities operating on a shoestring budget, without governmental support. We have struggled and scraped to put together the private funding to help these men change their lives. We have been blessed by our generous donors, many of whom are our graduates. But with the opioid epidemic and the addiction explosion in Kentucky, we can't keep up with the need. We're nowhere near meeting the needs of our addicted population. We have a six-month waiting list every single day of the year.

As a result, too many families have buried their sons and daughters while they were waiting for a treatment bed or a spot at a transitional housing recovery residence that is safe and drug-free. A place where the addicted person could have not only survived but THRIVED.

By the end of the day, nearly 5 more Kentuckians will have died of a drug overdose. The THRIVE programs and the CAREER Act Pilot Program will reduce those numbers. These programs are the infusion of hope that Kentuckians have been waiting for and praying for.