



**Testimony of David I. Boggs,  
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**Before the House Financial Services Subcommittee on  
Housing and Insurance**

**Hearing on  
“The Role of Federal Housing and Community Development  
Programs to Support Opioid and Substance Use Disorder  
Treatment and Recovery”**

**Thursday, August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 9:00 AM  
Courtroom A, U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of  
Kentucky  
101, Barr Street, Lexington KY, 40507**

Good afternoon Chairman Duff, Ranking Member Cleaver, and other distinguished members. It is an honor to address this committee in regards to the epidemic of opioid addiction in our nation and the serious housing challenges this population faces. Since housing is a vital step in the recovery and reentry process, the THRIVE Act and CAREER Act can have a major impact on abolishing this crisis. Considering that this epidemic touches every family in our nation, establishing long term solutions should indeed be a top priority.

I would like to share with you the role Opportunity for Work and Learning (OWL) plays in the topic at hand, and my views on how the Federal government can use existing housing and community development programs to complement community efforts to treat individuals experiencing opioid addiction. OWL provides key elements in the transitional path to self-sufficiency through job training and employment services.

Housing and employment go hand-in-hand, so it is difficult to successfully maintain one without the other. And yet too often, ex-offenders are lacking at least one of these once they are released from prison. Consistent housing cannot be obtained without employment that will provide enough income to meet the demands of either renting or owning. Many of these individuals lose their employment due to the challenges faced through inconsistent living conditions such as "couch surfing".

Individuals come to OWL from many different paths: returning citizens recently released from incarceration, a short or long-term recovery program, or someone struggling with opioid addiction while still trying to maintain employment. The struggle is overwhelming and often leads to more serious consequences.

OWL partners with communities to help individuals overcome barriers to achieve personal and professional growth. Annually, 600,000 people in our nation are being released from prison. The number of people at risk of falling back into the lifestyle that led them there in the first place continues to climb because of the lack of housing and employment. In addition to the criminal record preventing these individuals from finding jobs, statistics show that ex-offenders far too often have limited education and work experience, and therefore do not have the skills required to perform in the workforce.

The Lexington Manufacturing Center (LMC), a wholly owned subsidiary of OWL, is an on-site advanced manufacturing center that provides training in the essential skills so desperately needed and demanded by today's employers in every job sector. LMC employees earn more than minimum wage and have the opportunity for increases every 90 days. Other benefits include production bonuses, health insurance options, matching retirement and other company benefits. The various trainings LMC provides include a manufacturing certification in forklift and material handling as well as third-party inspection, kitting, assembly, and woodworking. The programs OWL and LMC have in place have proven to be successful in the path to self-sufficiency and the attainment of stable housing and employment.

OWL has maintained a strong partnership with the KY Office of Vocational Rehabilitation since 1961. This relationship has led to the employment or related services being provided to over 23, 000 individuals in central Kentucky. Through OWL's services and programs in FY18, over 74 participants gained full-time employment while more than 60% of them had some type of opioid or other substance abuse history. We fully adhere to WIOA mandates for youth and adults with barriers that are mandated for Community Rehabilitation Programs.

Paul came to OWL as a result of an on-going opioid addiction that cost him his home and family as well as jail time. Fortunately, a Drug Court diversion program opened their doors to him rather than long-term incarceration. Today, he is reunited with his family, whom he can now adequately support, and has home ownership.

James came to OWL after he had served over 24 years in our state and federal judicial systems. Thanks to OWL's partnership with community housing agencies, James was able to begin his pathway to a new life. Today, he has been employed at OWL for over five years, has full employee benefits, and lives independently.

Paul and James are just two examples of individuals who have struggled because of the impact the opioid addiction had on their lives. Sadly, they are not alone; there is an overwhelming need for housing and employment services for others trying to escape the opioid crisis in their life. Funding must be accessible for research based programs like OWL and others represented here today that have a proven track record of employment training, job placement and housing. Programs that can easily be replicated and expanded upon in our individual communities must be provided oversight and guidance to establish consistency and collaboration to maximize resources and human capital.

We applaud the work being done by this committee and the leadership Congressman Barr is providing in Congress and Kentucky through Bills he has sponsored. The battle against the housing and opioid crisis is not just a Kentucky epidemic but a national pandemic that has no borders. Thank you again for this opportunity to share with you the mission of OWL and our efforts to join with you in conquering this crisis.