



# RELEASE

Give Thanks. Live Life. Release.

I would like to start by extending a heartfelt thank you to Senators Harckham, Carlucci, Rivera and The Joint Senate Task Force on Opioids, Addiction, and Overdose Prevention for inviting me to today's testimony. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to share perspective on the fight against addiction, a chronic illness affecting one-in-three families in the United States. It is an honor to be here and my hope is that something I say will get us closer to putting a real action plan in place to solve the local and national opioid epidemic.

My name is Justin Gurland and I am one of the co-founders of Release Recovery. I am a master's level social worker, have over ten years of addiction treatment experience and have dedicated my life to helping families and their loved ones to recover from drug addiction. I am here representing Release Recovery and those who fight tirelessly for recovery. I have had the honor of witnessing hundreds of families continue their journey of recovery, through highly structured, non-clinical, sober living environments, which are a critical component of the continuum of care.

The vast majority of my experience has been spent running those highly structured sober living programs. My first 7 years were spent in New York City and the last 3 in Westchester County. Through this experience I have come to several definitive conclusions about the critical role that sober living plays in the long term outcomes of those trying to achieve sobriety.

1. The fact that insurance companies do not recognize sober living as a part of the continuum of care is a major problem. I have personally overseen hundreds of cases where we were able to put together the best clinical support this nation has to offer. That being said, that clinical support only goes so far and individuals going through the recovery process absolutely need to connect to a community.
2. While critical to recovery, good sober livings are expensive to run. They require full-time staff, case management, extensive drug testing, continuous staff training, in-house programming, a merit system that allows residents to gradually work towards their freedom as well as the general costs of running a property. These expenses, which drive up the cost to the resident, combined with insurance companies refusing to pay for sober living make it very hard for a working class family to afford to pay for this critical piece of the recovery process.
3. Sober living works. Especially when residents make a long-term commitment. We recently did an outcome study based off the first two years of our operation at Release in Yorktown Heights. Close to 75% of

the residents who went through our program are still clean today and leading productive lives. Our average length of stay is close to 7 months. These numbers far surpass those of the national average. The formula is simple...quality care, strong community and a staff that is committed to empowering residents to view their stay at Release as an "opportunity" and not a "punishment". We take a hands on, innovative approach, which is centered on endlessly loving our residents and teaching them that there is no shame in the recovery process. We also tend to have a lot of fun...some of the non-clinical outings we provide to our residents include: camping trips, paint ball, sky diving, frequent trips to NYC and nightly family dinners which provide each member of our community to laugh and see that they are worth it.

At the core of what we do is community. We need to look no further than the natural human need to belong, to be a part of, to be accepted, to be connected. Addiction brings people to a life of isolation, loneliness and desperation. We fight that with direct contradictions to each – community and love. Whether this sense of connection is being found within a sober living community, a 12-step community or rebuilt healthy family systems, it is crucial to recovery– crucial to combatting this epidemic.

We were asked here today to describe innovative approaches we take in treating addiction. The truth is, it is impossible to do in this 4-minute testimony. Recovery has to be seen, touched, felt. It is in the lives of our community that is being heartbroken by overdose. It is in the passion of my friend Susan Salomone who you will have the honor of hearing from shortly. A woman who fights vigorously in the memory of her son. It is also in the hearts of those in recovery who spread the message themselves to prove that recovery works! I would like to invite everyone in this room to our home at 482 Underhill Avenue in Yorktown Heights to see for yourself. Come hang out with us for a day and see what recovery really looks like. It is very easy for me to sit up here and explain what we do because it is my life's work and greatest passion. That being said, anyone who cares about this epidemic that is ravaging our country would be well served to come and actually understand the work that goes into day in the life of someone who is recovering. I have been told time and time again that there is a "magical" feeling at Release and I believe this to be true. I invite you all to come see the magic in hopes that more funding will be made available for sober living programs here in the great state of New York.

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