

12/6/21

Senators Schwank, Muth and Tartaglione, their colleagues and invited guests,

Heather and I want to express our gratitude to Senator Schank and her Legislative Director, Matt Maniskas, for working with us since August on these two bills and agreeing to be their prime sponsor. We also are grateful for Senators Kane, Kearney, Cappelletti and our first Republican co-sponsor Argall, for signing on to both these life-saving bills.

The first bill stems from an experience suffered by our son, Brendan, and this **travesty** is common to many in recovery. Brendan was 60 days sober and was agitated by **urges** to relapse, so he sought re-admission to Mirmont where he previously received excellent in-patient care. Mirmont wanted to admit him but our insurance policy company, Independence Blue Cross, refused to cover his admittance because he was **sober**, and therefore, they deemed treatment **not** medically necessary. Insurance Companies have turned their ASAM standard that one reporting for treatment **while** under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs **cannot** be turned away or refused coverage, on its ear, dictating that those who are **not** under the influence **should** be. With thousands of residents from every corner of Pennsylvania dying from overdoses from relapses, this common insurance company practice is tantamount to accessory to **murder**. Former CEO of IBC, Dan Hilferty, and his late, great board member, Andy Lewis, granted a few OCAN members and me a meeting with several of their top executives in March of 2018 to discuss our platform and when I told this story, the room fell silent. Finally, the EVP of Legal Services for IBC's partner, Magellan, stated, "We follow all laws related to coverage of addiction treatment services." I responded, "Well, I guess you need a new law." I call upon all members of the PA Senate to support this **life-saving** bill prohibiting health insurance companies from denying coverage for admittance for addiction treatment because of the sobriety status of those seeking treatment.

The second bill stems from Heather's **impossible** task of evaluating recovery homes for our son, Brendan, when he was in recovery. There is virtually **no** information available regarding recovery homes and she was forced to rely totally on word of mouth. She could not determine which recovery homes were equipped to address Brendan's **dual** diagnosis, suffering **both** bipolar and substance use disorders, which facilities had residents who suffered death, relapses, assaults or terroristic threats during the past year, or even how many beds and staff members a facility had and what their staff's qualifications were. Before I had my hips replaced, I knew everything about the outcomes of my surgeon's patients. I knew how many surgeries he had performed, that no one ever died on his table or suffered post-surgical infections. All this data was verified by the state. By virtue of this tremendous disparity of availability of information about qualifications and outcomes between those providing **surgical** and **mental** health and addiction treatment, the status quo in Pennsylvania is a **clear** violation of the Federal Parity Act of 2008.

I will be forever haunted by the call we received from Brendan when he was transitioned from his partial hospitalization facility where he received excellent care, to the recovery home they recommended to us. He said, "I don't feel safe here." I replied, "Then come home and I will find one where you do feel safe." Tragically, I did not do that. I did not know where to start. Less than three weeks later, Brendan relapsed and died in our home. This bill provides those in recovery and their loved ones a place to start.

Our proposed bill is very similar to what the Department of Education provides on its web site about the state's childcare centers. The Department of Education sends a survey to all childcare centers and publishes the data they collect on its website. Parents can search for childcare

centers by zip code. There is absolutely **no** reason the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs cannot provide the same service to those evaluating treatment centers and recovery homes. This is **not** an onerous bill. It is **not** over-regulation or over-sized government. Our vision for this bill is that it will provide a universal metric based on one with which the recovery community is well familiar, our “average days of wellness” is based on “days sober” with which those in recovery often use to introduce themselves during their meetings. In order to provide this metric, the state will have to build an infrastructure of a **continuum** of care and **reporting** of outcomes that would finally provide **transparency** to this largely **unregulated** industry. I urge every Senator to co-sponsor this **life-saving** bill.

I will close with the last stanza of a poem I wrote for Brendan when he was in recovery. “The greatest courage does not heed what lies behind, or retreat from what lies ahead, but knows with certainty that these forces pale in comparison to the yet-undiscovered strength of what lies within.”

Thank you,
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