

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 544

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH

Hearing Date: March 24, 2021 8:00 AM

Carl Hunter

Recovery Coalition of Texas (RCT)

Austin, TX

I support this bill because the voluntary certification of recovery housing protects the end user. I also support this bill because my life was transformed as a result of the stability and accountability that living in a recovery house gave me in my journey to sustained recovery. In the spectrum of community-based recovery support services, recovery housing, provides a drug free atmosphere that many of us need to move to self-sufficiency. Voluntary certification takes into account fair housing guidelines and puts the responsibility on the recovery housing provider to voluntarily follow a set of recognized standards that will ultimately protect that son, daughter, the kid next or the adult next door, all of whom are taking this path to transform their lives. I urge you to take this action in a effort to identify those recovery housing providers who are willing to hold a standard of excellence.

Margarita Luna

Texas Criminal Justice Coalition

Austin, TX

Thank you Rep Minjarez for your attention to this matter. I support this bill and hope to work with your office in the future.

Elizabeth Henry

Self

Round Rock, TX

Texas needs voluntary recovery housing certification to ensure that we appropriately connect persons in recovery from substance use issues to supportive living environments that promote cost effective outcomes and support long term recovery. By linking referrals and funding to certification, recovery homes and substance use treatment providers will know the quality and level of care available to meet the needs of people in recovery from substance use disorders. Brokering is happening across Texas between providers, detox facilities and recovery homes. Certification provides a much needed mechanism to report incidents and investigate allegations that Texas does not currently have.

Richard Bradshaw

Recovery Advocacy Project

Waco, TX

I support this bill as a person in long-term recovery and as a treatment professional. Keeping standards and regulations on Recovery housing will ensure that all individuals living in them are treated ethically and have access to evidence based treatment that leads to better health outcomes for individuals with a substance use disorder.

Nelson Spence

Self

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Plano, TX

I support this bill because our communities need safe and affordable recovery housing. Unfortunately some places posing as recovery housing are not up to national standards and best practices, and they can end up harming people. Please pass this bill.

Lisa Medina

Self/trauma therapist

Austin, TX

I support this bill because it will allow for oversight to protect people living with substance use disorders obtain the care they deserve and protect them from being exploited and abused.

Zachary Abrego

Self

Eules, TX

I this this is a great idea

Dylan Hollingsworth

Self- Photojournalist

Dallas, TX

This avoids exploitation and inept service providers.

Christine Yanas, VP of Policy & Advocacy

Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.

San Antonio, TX

Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas is in support of HB 544 by Rep. Ina Minjarez.

Jason Howell

Self

Elgin, TX

My name is Jason Howell. I am representing myself as a person in long term recovery from substance use issues. I am submitting written testimony in support of HB 544, because Texans need a means of distinguishing between safe and supportive recovery housing and bad players. Research reveals that recovery housing is a cost effective means of improving abstinence rates, mental health, and monthly income for person with a substance use disorder, but in the last ten years, there has been a rise in exploitive business practices across the US. In 2012, I helped establish the National Alliance for Recovery Residences, a codes of ethics, and national standards across all four types of recovery homes found in the US. I have provided edits to SAMHSA recovery housing best practice guidelines and ONDCP's state model laws regarding recovery housing. I was interviewed by the GAO for the report on recovery housing, and I have helped establish recovery housing certification programs in multiple states. It is through this lens, I can tell you Texas has a problem, and we need HB 544 implemented into law this Session. As other states have implemented legislation, similar to HB 544, the bad players have moved to states, such as Texas, because there is no oversight. While Texas has some of the best recovery homes in the nation, I increasingly hear from individuals and family members who have been duped by false marketing, traded like a commodity between recovery homes and treatment providers in order to exploit their financial resources, sexually harassed and more. In 2020, I got a dreaded call about a friend had died related to negligence on the part of his recovery home. It was also the year I spoke with a number of former recovery home residents and

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staff who were still traumatized by abuse they experienced and witnessed at the hand of the recovery home owner. This is unacceptable, especially when there is a proven means of cost effectively promoting quality recovery housing and protecting consumer rights. HB 544 takes the best of what other states have implemented to create the best policy for Texans. Please support HB 544.

Christina Glenn, Director of business development

Infinite recovery

Austin, TX

Fraudulent business practices, patient brokering, kickbacks and misleading marketing cause unethical referrals, financial exploitation and inadequate support are costing Texans their lives and draining the states resources.

Daniel Hatcher

Self

Dallas, TX

I support this bill. As a member of the recovery community, we need a system to take out bad actors in the recovery housing realm.

Shannon Hoffman

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

AUSTIN, TX

One essential resource that enables individuals to achieve and maintain a life in recovery is recovery housing. Recovery housing refers to a range of housing models that should be considered part of the larger continuum of care for individuals seeking and in recovery from substance use conditions. Identified by the Texas Statewide Behavioral Health Strategic Plan as a major gap, access to housing is a critical issue across the state.

Texans in recovery from substance use not only need access to recovery housing, but deserve access to quality recovery housing. This can be promoted by implementing and incentivizing voluntary recovery housing certification linked to nationally recognized standards. Individuals living in recovery housing have a greater chance of achieving long-term recovery than those who do not live in recovery-oriented environments. Living in quality recovery housing has been associated with positive outcomes, including decreased substance use, reduced probability of relapse/reoccurrence, and lower rates of incarceration.

HB 544 adopts a common definition of recovery housing and establishes a voluntary recovery housing certification program based on national standards. HB 544 directs HHSC to adopt standards that are consistent with nationally recognized standards. Currently, 36 states use or reference NARR Standards as their template. It's also important to note that of the states that require credentialing, most require certification to obtain public funds, or to obtain referrals from state licensed treatment programs.

HB 544 protects vulnerable populations and promotes cost-effective outcomes for individuals in recovery from substance use disorder using market incentives and education to promote the use of ethical and best practices. Certification not only empowers consumer choice, but provides reliable information for referrals and a means of reporting concerns. State and local governments are restricted from regulating recovery housing due to the fair housing rights of residents, which is why the National Council on Behavioral Health and Model State Drug Laws recommend voluntary recovery housing certification as the solution.

Well operated recovery housing is a proven and cost-effective means of promoting recovery from substance use issues and cost savings. However, there has been rise in "bad players" given the current marketplace. Fraudulent business practices, patient brokering, kickbacks, and misleading marketing cause unethical referrals, financial exploitation, and inadequate support. HB 544 provides an opportunity to support recovery housing operators and improve the availability of quality recovery housing.

Kamesha Baker

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Self, Detective/Police Officer

Houston, TX

Texas needs voluntary recovery housing certification to ensure that we appropriately connect persons in recovery from substance use issues to supportive living environments that promote cost effective outcomes and support long term recovery. By linking referrals and funding to certification, recovery homes can become more sustainable and reliable across the state. Voluntary certification also gives referral sources, like substance use treatment providers confidence in knowing they are referring to a home that can meet the needs of people in recovery from substance use disorders. A practice known as patient brokering is happening across Texas between providers, detox facilities, and recovery homes. At this current time as a law enforcement professional learning about these egregious incidents my hands are tied in terms of investigating potentially criminal offenses due to the limited regulations and requirements. Requiring certification provides a much needed mechanism for individuals to report incidents and address allegations of exploitation, negligence and unethical practices that Texas does not currently have. Please support HB 544.

Allison Greer Francis, Mrs.

The Center for Health Care Services VP-External Relations

San Antonio, TX

I support HB 544 relating to the voluntary certification of recovery houses. Recovery houses promote sustained recovery from substance use disorders by integrating residents into the community, and utilizing other individuals with lived experience (peers) to assist in the recovery process. Research shows that recovering addicts are far less likely to relapse if they are able to utilize a recovery house to help them transition back into society. According to SAMHSA, relapse can be common among people treated for SUD and these high rates of relapse highlight the need for finding new ways to approach treatment. Peer-run, recovery-oriented housing will fill a service gap in our community by offering a safe, alcohol- and drug-free environment that people in recovery need as they begin rebuilding their lives.

Cynthia Humphrey

Assoc. of Substance Abuse Providers

Kerrville, TX

I am representing the Association of Substance Abuse Programs (ASAP) in favor of HB 544. The Association represents substance use disorder prevention, treatment and recovery service providers across the state. The majority of our members are private non-profit organizations that contract with the state to provide safety-net services.

Quality recovery housing is an important component in the continuum of care for substance use disorders and is associated with positive outcomes including decreased substance use, reduced probability of relapse/reoccurrence, and lower rates of incarceration. Currently the public has little in the way of understanding what a recovery residence "is" or how to recognize quality practices. HB 544 will help patients and their families make informed choices and promote quality business and ethical marketing practices in the industry.

Treatment providers often recommend staying in a recovery residence post-treatment as a part of their continuum of care plan. Not only will HB 544 promote informed consumer choice, but will assist treatment providers identify and refer patients to quality recovery housing in the patient's preferred community.

HB 544 will help educate and train operators about how to operate a safe recovery home and implement best practices. It will help the public understand what a recovery residence is and help them to recognize a well operated home. It also establishes a complaint mechanism which will help identify homes with poor and/or unethical practices. Instead of requiring mandatory regulation HB 544, incentivizes certification by requiring state-funded houses to be certified and links referrals from state-funded treatment programs to certified homes. And, for the many good recovery home operators throughout the state, certification provides a way to recognize their current quality practices as well as an incentive, not a requirement, to pursue certification.

The Association of Substance Abuse Programs believes the time has come for recovery housing to be considered both a vital,

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necessary and needed part of the care continuum. With that distinction comes a responsibility to the public and their industry to operate according to a set of quality standards. We urge the committee to vote in favor of HB 544.

If you have questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me at 512-923-1173. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Christine Bryan, VP, Information Technology and Public Policy
Clarity Child Guidance Center
San Antonio, TX

Clarity Child Guidance Center is in full support of HB 544. Clarity is a non-profit providing inpatient and outpatient behavioral health services to children ages 3-17. Clarity's patient census is comprised of 70% low-income, state-supported children through Medicaid, CHIP, STARHealth, STARKids and low-cost contracts with area local mental health authorities.

Research shows that recovering addicts are far less likely to relapse if they are able to utilize a recovery house to help them transition back into society. Peer-run, recovery-oriented housing will fill a service gap in our community by offering a safe, alcohol- and drug-free environment that people in recovery need as they begin rebuilding their lives. Clarity feels strongly that as we expand service and treatment opportunities into our communities, we give our kids the best opportunities to thrive in healthier families. On behalf of our kids and families, we ask you please support HB 544.

Jennifer Priddy, Program Director
Thriving United
Midland, TX

One of the ten basic guiding principles of recovery* is
Home – having a consistent, peaceful and stable place to return to each day will help remove uncertainty and anxiety that can lead to self-destructive behavior.
There are recognized and proven quality standards and ethics for recovery residences that lead to best practices that will assist in transition and enhance long term recovery.
People in Recovery have rights to access non discriminatory housing opportunities that empower them individually and collectively encourage them to maintain recovery regardless of their pathway.
10 guiding principles of recovery SAMHSA.

Garrett Stewart, Director of Operations
Thriving United
Midland, TX

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Pat Brown, Executive Director
Thriving United
Midland, TX

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