

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 707

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH

Hearing Date: March 24, 2021 8:00 AM

Eric Kunish, NAMI Central Texas Advocacy Chair

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Austin, TX

I am FOR this bill! When many of the state hospitals began closing in the 1960's, the goal was to develop community housing to replace them. Due to funding and various reasons, that has not happened. Co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders can contribute to the onset and chronicity of housing instability and homelessness.

Step-down and congregate housing provides residents access to community-based supportive services to facilitate a smooth transition back into independence and self-sufficiency. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Marilyn Hartman

Member and Advocate, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Central Texas

Austin, TX

I support this bill. Please pass it.

Carl Hunter, Senior Policy Advisor

Recovery Coalition of Texas (RCT)

Austin, TX

As the need for recovery housing expands in the State of Texas as a viable evidence-based and community-based post treatment solution to support ongoing recovery, it is important to know the existing number of recovery housing that exists and where they are concentrated. It is also important to know which recovery housing providers are following nationally recognized standards. A study of this nature will provide that information and more. This would be especially valuable when looking at the availability of this post-treatment solution in rural communities.

Elizabeth Henry

Self

Round Rock, TX

I am testifying in support of HB 707, because Texas needs an Interim Report on recovery housing in order to develop informed strategic policy that ensures that we appropriately connect persons in recovery from substance use issues to supportive living environments that promote cost effectively outcomes. Also, an interim will help us better understand the recovery housing landscape allowing for an efficient expansion recovery housing in our state.

Please support HB 707.

Sydney Carter, Mental Health Policy Fellow

Network of Behavioral Health Providers

Houston, TX

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My name is Sydney Carter, and I am the Mental Health Policy Fellow at the Network of Behavioral Health Providers (NBHP). NBHP is a collaborative of the leadership of over 40 public and private, for-profit and non-profit mental health and substance use disorder services providers in greater Houston. I am pleased to submit this written testimony in support of HB 707, concerning a study on expanding recovery housing in the state.

HB 707 would allow the Health & Human Services Commission to fully study and understand the current state of recovery housing in Texas, as well as assess the need for expansion of these housing options. Understanding the problem is the first step to finding a solution to this great need. The number of Texans who will need recovery housing will continue to increase as substance use disorders have increased during the pandemic. A survey conducted in June 2020 found that 13.3% of adults reported new or increased substance use due to stress from COVID-19.

People who suffer with substance use disorders can sometimes find themselves experiencing homelessness due to addiction. Recovery housing helps reduce homelessness and improves housing stability for people with behavioral health issues, specifically those recovering from substance use disorder. Recovery housing provides a stable, supportive environment as individuals work to get back on their feet after a substance use disorder and/or addiction.

Housing is often the cornerstone of treatment; it provides psychological, emotional, occupational, and interpersonal support. Without a safe, stable place to recover, medication adherence and abstinence from substance can prove difficult. In addition, many people who leave acute care treatment and need a transitional period of housing and wraparound support to successfully reintegrate back into the community. An example of recovery housing options are Sober living houses (SLH), which are facilities that provide safe housing and supportive, structured living conditions for people exiting drug rehabilitation programs. SLHs serve as a transitional environment between such programs and regular housing. A person living in a recovery home documents an estimated \$29,000 in cost savings (per person) when compared to that person living in the community with no recovery support.

In light of the growing need for recovery housing, as well as its documented cost benefits, we urge you to pass HB 707 out of committee so Texas can begin strategizing on how to expand this housing option across the state.

Linda Mikolajek, Ms.

Nami Central Tx

Austin, TX

I am a member of NAMI Central Texas. I am writing to ask you to support and vote for H.B. 707: relating to a study on expanding recovery housing in this state.

Co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders can contribute to the onset and chronicity of housing instability and homelessness.

Step-down and congregate housing provides residents access to community-based supportive services to facilitate a smooth transition back into independence and self-sufficiency.

I have a friend whose son has been hospitalized 71 times. He has a co-occurring serious mental illness and substance abuse. He has recently been released after several months from the Aston State Hospital. He was not stable with his mental illness when he left and they did nothing to help with his substance-abuse. After six months of treatment he was released and within a week he is doing math, smoking marijuana, and not taking his medications. He was placed in the AOT program but in about a months time the Judge, Judge Herman kicked him out of the AOT program. He really should have been mandated to go back to the hospital since he was not following the criteria set up by the AOT. Now he is totally on his own with no support and deteriorating daily. He won't quite likely either go through the revolving door of hospitalizations or jail or my biggest fear is that he will die. He is 39 years old and his mother is a strong advocate for mental illness and has served as an officer of NAMI Central Texas in the past. Her health is failing due to anxiety and depression related to her sons condition. Another friend, who is 70 years old has a daughter who keeps cycling between jail and hospitals. She was at a sober house and doing well but they will not treat her mental illness. They say she is too sick mentally for them to help treat her with her drug and alcohol addiction. Consequently she is pretty much on her own and has been arrested a few times and then the case is dismissed and then back to no hope and a future. My own son who is 38 years old has a serious mental illness and has been at Austin State Hospital for almost a year. He was in the hospital for four months in 2019 and upon release he had no supportive housing, no continuum of care, and before he got readmitted on a police officer emergency detention a few months later, he had been arrested three times and the case is dropped. His serious mental illness needs to be supported once he is discharged from the hospital. He had reached recovery in the past, a few years ago but without the support he stopped taking his medications and the cycle continues. He does not have a substance-

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abuse problem, But he like my friends children and many many others need help and support and housing is probably one of the biggest parts they can get. It does not mean throwing them in a group home to fend for themselves but actual continue on my supportive care that will help them to be successful. Please forward to Support house bill 707.

Richard Bradshaw
Recovery Advocacy Project
Waco, TX

I support this bill as a person in long-term recovery and as a treatment professional.

Heather Green
Self
Waco, TX

I live in sober living and it has been an essential part of my recovery and becoming a productive member of society

Nelson Spence
Self
Plano, TX

Our communities need more recovery housing. Recovery housing is proven to improve treatment outcomes while reducing costs to communities. Please pass this bill.

Zachary Abrego
Self
Fort worth, TX

I think this is a great idea

Dylan Hollingsworth
Self-Photojournalist
Dallas, TX

Reintegration into community, family and society after treatment require additional measures and safety nets. Let's help our brothers and sisters be successful in rebuilding their lives, which will only lead to a healthier society.

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, and I am submitting written testimony in support of HB 707, because addiction is a costly disease, but I am living proof that recovery is possible. It actually should be expected, if an individual has access to appropriate supports and services, including recovery housing. Many people return from residential treatment or outpatient therapy back to a living environment that enables an addictive lifestyle. This is why recovery housing is so vital. People starting and sustaining long term recovery need a sober, safe and peer supportive environment where they can learn to live recovery. The interim study called for by HB 707 will allow Texas to understand the potential and appropriate role of recovery housing within the continuum of care, identify challenges and gaps as

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well as develop recommendations. Please support HB 707.

Allison Greer Francis, Mrs.
The Center for Health Care Services
San Antonio, TX

I support HB 707, which would require HHSC to study and evaluate the expansion of recovery housing in the state. The addition of recovery housing in Texas would add an extra resource for addicts who are transitioning back into society. In Bexar County, there are few resources available for recovering addicts who need further time to recover and reintegrate back into their communities.

Kamesha Baker
Self, Detective/Police Officer
Houston, TX

Texas should offer recovery housing in rural and urban areas across Texas to provide persons in recovery from substance use supportive living environments that promote effective recovery outcomes. Conducting a study that allows the state to understand and determine the needs of persons in recovery from substance use will help the state effectively identify the current status of recovery housing in Texas, the impact of state and federal regulatory deficiencies in recovery housing, and more cost efficient and effective ways to provide persons in recovery from substance use with supportive living environments.

Cynthia Humphrey
Association of Substance Abuse Programs
Kerrville, TX

I am providing comment on behalf of the Association of Substance Abuse Programs in favor of HB 707. The Association represents substance use disorder prevention, treatment and recovery support service providers across the state. The majority of our members are private non-profit organizations that have long standing histories of contracting with the state to provide safety-net services.

Recovery housing is an important, necessary, and needed component in the care continuum for substance use disorders and is associated with positive outcomes. Individuals living in recovery housing experience decreased substance use, reduced probability of relapse/reoccurrence, and lower rates of incarceration. In short, individuals living in recovery housing have a greater chance of achieving long-term recovery than those who do not live in recovery-oriented environments.

Currently we know little about the recovery housing industry across the state. We hear in our informal conversations with treatment providers, patients, and families that it is difficult to find a quality “bed” in their community. Because recovery homes, also known as “sober homes” or “halfway houses”, are not formally registered or regulated it is difficult to easily assess current capacity and understand what is needed to help make this vital recovery service more effective, available, and accessible to Texans.

HB 707 directs HHSC to evaluate the current status of recovery housing in the state and assess the opportunities, challenges, and needs to expand recovery housing. We believe HB 707 will lay the necessary groundwork for building a strong quality continuum of care for substance use disorders in Texas, which includes housing and other recovery support services.

We urge the committee to pass HB 707 which will help Texans to achieve and sustain long-term recovery from substance use disorders.

Thank you for your attention and consideration. If you have questions or need additional information please feel free to contact me at chumphrey@asaptexas.org or 512-923-1173.