

## HF287 written public testimony submitted via NAMI Minnesota

To: Behavioral Health Policy Division

January 30, 2021

I am writing to you regarding the sober homes in Minnesota. My beautiful intelligent daughter has struggled with addiction for many years now and has been thru many sober homes in the Twin City area. Some good, some bad, and ALL very expensive! The idea of a sober communal living home environment is an admiral one. Unfortunately, there are many that are in it just for the money and are exploiting our loved one's illness. Some should be investigated for putting vulnerable adults in harm's way. I am hoping you can work to consider oversight options for these sober homes and hold owners accountable for the safety of sober home residents.

Please allow me to share some of the experience my daughter has endured through the years.

All Sober homes require a hefty security deposit to secure the next available bed. These deposits are expensive and if a person relapses the deposit is not returned. Relapse is part of the disease and it isn't sustainable for people to repeatedly lose all this money. These people are struggling and desperate. Most do not have 5 or 6 hundred dollars for a deposit. Unfortunately, relapse is common occurrence when one is struggling to achieve sobriety. They cannot afford 5 to 6 hundred dollars every time they relapse. It's a vicious cycle and needs to be rectified.

One time after being released from in-patient treatment my daughter was sent to a MASH Sober Home. The owner was condescending and verbally abusive toward my daughter AND toward me. She kicked my daughter out at 7:45 AM just minutes before she had to leave for her outpatient treatment and would not allow her back into the residence to collect her belongings for **4 DAYS!** This meant my daughter who suffers from mental illness along with addiction did not have access to her medications for **4 days!** When I tried to explain the urgency of this to the owner, she dismissed it and said My daughter should have thought to grab them on her way out the door. She was kicked out because she didn't make the number of meetings she was mandated to attend per week. She did not relapse. She did not receive her deposit back. Most of the people who need sober house living have a dual diagnosis and suffer from some other kind of mental health illness in addition to addiction. Most of these patients are not stable after a brief 28 day stay at an in-patient facility. Making the transition to staying in a sober home can be touch and go and it is evident that the sober-house owners do not have any training dealing with mental Health. I believe there would be better success if we can mandate that becoming a sober homeowner and operator would require training and licensing.

The discharge practice of some of these homes is careless and, in my opinion, reckless. I was told the same sober home operator threw out an 18-year-old girl during the night because she had relapsed. The young girl was inebriated and thrown out when the temperature in MN was 50 below 0 outside! That's a deadly temperature! This incident was reported to the drug counselors at the treatment center the next morning, but I see this sober home is still open for business. We need to change this discharge practice and hold them accountable for a person's safety! I have only met one Sober homeowner who had a background in Mental Health.

My daughter had negative experiences at another MASH sober home. This sober house in Minneapolis was filthy and had people using drugs on the premises. It had obvious electrical hazards, insufficient

refrigerator space and bathroom access. The house had ONE bathroom for 8 women! The one bathroom only had a small cheap shower surround stall that leaked outside of the stall, so the bathroom reeked of mold and mildew. The kitchen had a very old stove and fridge that were much smaller than average. They reminded me of appliances you see in a camper. The owner was charging eight women \$650 per month each to live there. We need to put a limit on how many people you can cram into one home in relation to what they will provide for them. We have pulled our daughter out of sober homes because of their conditions. We do not receive our deposit back. There is no agency that actively oversees or supports the patient.

My daughter has been in sober homes that had 4 to 6 women crammed in a basement with no other fire escape except the steps leading upstairs. Doesn't the fire Marshall inspect sober homes? The safety of these vulnerable adults needs to be a priority.

My daughter has stayed in some very good houses with good support too. I would say Helen's house in Minneapolis was the best. Another good one is Safe Haven in St Paul. These are two examples of sober homes that are engaged with the adults they are housing and supportive of their recovery process. They have managers that live on sight. I have found that it makes a significant difference with more positive results.

I'm sharing the negative experiences so you can see the urgency requiring your attention. Sober homes are a very important part to one's sobriety and it is important that they are properly managed to achieve success. I hope you can work to provide the necessary regulations and help protect the rights of the vulnerable adults who really need a safe and sober home.

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like any more information.

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January 31, 2021

My experience was in 2011 at a sober home located on Grand Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota. When I made arrangements to live there, the owner and I discussed that I would not be working as I was attending an intensive DBT outpatient program and other counseling. About a month after I began living there, she demanded that I be out of the house during daytime hours. Prior to this, I had been coming home when I was not attending DBT, counseling, or AA. She told me I should go sit in a coffee shop. When I told her that was not what we agreed upon and I refused, she told me she was evicting me. At the time, I had a county case manager. Together the three of us agreed that I would have 30 days in which to find new

housing. That same night, at a house meeting, she told me I had to move out now or she would call the police. This was despite the fact that my rent (\$450 for ½ room and 1 bathroom for 11 women) was paid in full, I was not using, and I complied with all house rules and rules in my lease. She also refused to return my security deposit although there was no damage. I was one of the “older” women in the house (40’s). Prior to this she had thrown out 3 other older women on questionable grounds. It appeared that she only wanted very young women in the home and that she was threatened by the women who were her age.

Catherine Rogers