

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for allowing me to speak to you today.

My name is Rachelle Gardner and I have the privilege of serving as the Director of Adolescent Services for Fairbanks, an addiction treatment center, and as the Chief Operating Officer of Hope Academy, a recovery high school, both located in Indianapolis, Indiana. Hope Academy is the only recovery high school in Indiana and one of 35 recovery schools in the United States. For the last four years, I have served as the chair of the board of directors for the Association of Recovery Schools, also known as ARS. The mission of ARS is to support and inspire recovery schools for optimum performance, empowering hope and access to every student in recovery. My entire career has been dedicated to working with youth who are struggling with substance abuse.

The abuse of opiates continues to rise in Central Indiana. According to the Indiana University Center for Health Policy, the number of adolescents receiving treatment for opiate dependence has risen 9% over the last five years. In the same time period, the number of young adults ages 18 to 24 receiving treatment for opiate dependence has risen 5%. One of the most staggering statistics is that the number of deaths related to overdose from opiates has quadrupled since 1999. Over the last 18 months, Fairbanks has admitted 360 young people ages 15 to 23 who indicated opiates as their primary drug of choice.

Heroin holds a firm grip on its victims and the withdrawal experience from this drug are extremely painful and challenging to overcome. Another danger of heroin is the significant potential for a fatal overdose. According to the Indiana State Department of Health, in 2011 there were 63 heroin-related deaths in Indiana and in 2013 that number increased to 152.

All of the programs and services at Fairbanks for adults and adolescents are driven by our mission to 'focus on recovery'. Recovery from alcohol and drug addiction is challenging for anyone, but especially for our young people who have yet to develop the coping skills and realistic life perspectives necessary to work a successful recovery program. In the United States, 80% of students relapse from recovery upon returning to their high school following primary treatment for substance abuse. Fairbanks was seeing this same trend and in response, opened Hope Academy in 2006.

Hope Academy is a public charter school sponsored by the Indianapolis Mayor's Office. We serve students in grades 9 through 12 who are seeking a safe, sober and supportive environment. As an alternative education school we are committed to small class sizes with highly qualified teachers who are well trained to educate and support students in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. Even more, most of our students struggle with co-occurring behavioral and mental health issues; yet because of the expertise of our staff, we are able to concurrently address these issues. Because of these essential aspects to educating substance impacted youth, running a recovery high school can be costly. The average cost in the United States to educate a student in a recovery high school is \$20,000 per year. At Hope Academy we receive about \$14,000 per student from the state each year.

The key to a successful recovery program is changing the people, places and things in your life. Sending a child back to their former school puts them in the environment that may have led to their drug use. Hope Academy provides these students with an environment that contributes to academic success, personal growth and life-long recovery. Our students' success is measured in growth. We define growth in many ways; the number of days they remain abstinent from drugs and alcohol, their ability to obtain credits to

graduate, repairing relationships with families and friends and developing much needed life skills such as communication, organization and good decision making.

Over the last nine years we have served more than 500 students. Some of these students felt strong enough in their recovery to successfully transition back to their home school and graduate. Yet, over 100 students chose to stay and are now alumni of Hope Academy. Many have pursued a postsecondary education or advanced vocational training with the goal of joining the work force and contributing positively to their communities.

Academic achievement and recovery success are our primary goals. As such, we are actively involved in conducting research to help us understand what works at Hope Academy, as a means to continuously enhance outcomes. We have partnered with Indiana Wesleyan University's Addictions Counseling Program to produce a website that publishes our joint studies conducted at Hope Academy for the purpose of sharing outcomes with other recovery schools. One recent study produced data that strongly suggests students attending Hope Academy were overall persistent in their education, which in turn reduced their behavioral and mental health issues while increasing the strength of their recoveries.

Through my work with the Association of Recovery Schools, I have become quite familiar with the national advocacy efforts surrounding *The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2015* or CARA, for short. Last year, Senator Whitehouse of Rhode Island and Senator Portman of Ohio submitted this critical piece of federal legislation. If passed, this would authorize increased funding for treatment, recovery and criminal justice systems while aiming to reduce opioid misuse and overdose deaths. In section 303 of CARA, the National Youth Recovery Initiative is of special importance to the various organizations I represent because of the attention it pays to adolescent treatment and recovery resources. We have learned from our research that having the necessary wrap around services available for adolescents and their families is critical. We know now that long-term recovery does not occur in a vacuum especially for youth and young adults. This bill would provide the funding necessary for these services at a macro-level. This passage of the legislation is critical to helping our youth, our families and our communities who are fighting this epidemic on a daily basis.

How can you help? Each of you can help us get the resources needed to make a lasting impact on the opiate crisis at a national level by first empowering our local communities.

The disease of addiction has permeated our society for hundreds of years and drug trends change with the times. In my 25 years of experience, I have never seen a class of drugs take hold on young people like opiates. They are highly addictive and too often lead to premature death. Opiates are claiming the lives of our country's future leaders. My hope in testifying today is that together we can not only provide young people the access to treatment and recovery supports they need but also to restore their hope for a positive future.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and I look forward to answering any of your questions.