

SB 675

Written Testimony

Provided by Jason Snyder

Regional Director of Strategic Partnerships

Pinnacle Treatment Centers

Dear Chairmen and Members of the House Human Services Committee:

My name is Jason Snyder. I am regional director of strategic partnerships for Pinnacle Treatment Centers (PTC). PTC provides the continuum of addiction treatment services in six states, including Pennsylvania, where we operate 13 opioid treatment programs from which we provide each of the three FDA-approved medications to treat opioid addiction along with varying levels of outpatient counseling.

Prior to my current role, I was regional director of operations for PTC. Before coming to PTC, I was a special assistant to the secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, where I oversaw implementation and operation of the commonwealth's 45 opioid use disorder Centers of Excellence. Prior to that, I was communications director for the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs.

I am here today to share my personal story and the perspective I have developed as a result.

I am a lifelong Pennsylvanian, born and raised in Cambria County the oldest of three boys. My parents have been married for 48 years and gave their children every opportunity to succeed.

Despite our upbringing, in 2005, my brother Todd, at 28-years-old, died of a heroin overdose. Todd was a college graduate with a degree in accounting who left behind a six-year-old daughter at the time. I was the second person on the scene of Todd's death and as such, made what to this day has been the most difficult phone call I've ever made, and that was to my parents to tell them their son was dead.

Even with Todd's death, our nightmare was not over. In 2007, my 25-year-old brother Josh died of a drug overdose. His son was born exactly two months after Josh's death. My family at this point was dismantled and reeling.

As the last man standing – the last living child of my parents – in 2011 I told my parents I needed treatment for my opioid addiction. Fortunately for me, since then my story has been much different than my brothers', and today I identify as a person in long-term recovery from the disease of addiction.

As I've walked my path over the last several years, crossing the commonwealth countless times, I've encountered parents just like mine who have either buried children or who are on pins and needles waiting for the dreadful phone call I had to make. I have heard stories from mothers of children who have left residential treatment stays only to die days later. And I have seen firsthand others besides my brothers – friends – who have died from this disease. A common thread through many of these deaths was the lack of medication as part of a treatment plan.

At the same time, I have also seen the transformative power of medications like buprenorphine and methadone in helping people to recover from their addiction to opioids.

Addiction has surely touched many in this room today. Some of you may have inspiring, redeeming stories of loved ones who overcame addiction to live beautiful lives of recovery today. That is part of my story.

Some may be living the nightmare of addiction as they sit here today, afraid every time their phone rings what they might have to hear. That is part of my family's story, too.

But unless you have buried a child, sibling or spouse, you cannot know the finality of that death. Sympathize as you may, if you have not buried a close loved one to this disease, you will never feel the longing in your soul for that person and the sickness of heart that comes with knowing that you will never get one more chance on this Earth to be with them. You will never know the heart ache. You will not have the dark days during which you agonizingly ask the question, "What if?" You will not be smothered by the shame and guilt of "If only."

It's no secret there is a rift in the addiction treatment world between the pro-MAT camp and abstinence-only camp. In the name of one's own philosophy, it is easy to risk someone else's life by creating barriers to tools that are proven to keep people alive and give them a chance to move along a path of recovery. In doing so, we are conceding that death is very possible and in essence saying we are OK with it.

I can guarantee you this: my parents would much rather have their two dead sons alive today and on a medication that can give them a chance at recovery from addiction than dead and laying side by side in a graveyard in Portage, PA, which is where they are today.

I implore this committee to consider that as they make decisions that will have far-reaching consequences.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted by:

Jason Snyder
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Pinnacle Treatment Centers