

Joint Senate Task Force on Opioids, Addiction & Overdose Prevention

Thank you to the Joint Senate Task Force On Opioids, Addiction & Overdose Prevention for asking Anthony Rizzuto of Families In Support Of Treatment ~ who asked me to testify in his absence today ~ for giving me an opportunity to share some ideas and thoughts on improving our response and outcome as a whole community.

My name is Claudia Capie Frizzell. I am a mother of four children, three are “earthly bound”. I am on the Advisory Committee of Families In Support Of Treatment, a lifetime family member of Samaritan Daytop Family Association, a member of LIRA (Long Island Recovery Association. I am a Family Support Group Facilitator at Hope House Ministries and Thrive Recovery Center (for FIST) working the Smart Recovery for Friends and Family Program, but my day job is a Library Clerk at the Comsewogue Public Library.

I come before you today as a Mom of a child, my oldest son Marc Lewis, who struggled with addiction and died of an accidental overdose in May of 2000, mom of a transgender male who struggles with severe anxiety and a sister of a young man – my brother Frank Capie, who also struggled with addiction, who died of AIDS September 1990. I have firsthand experience of the affects of mental health and substance use disorder on the family and community.

Although there have been many good changes made in the recent years with how we respond, treat and support those in our communities who have struggled with substance use disorder, there is still much to overcome. We can and must do better not just for the identified person but for their families who have been shattered financially, mentally and physically due to long term stress, trauma and hopelessness.

There are still too many families who are mentally & physically fatigued from the daily fight of this disease that ravages their loved one or worse case, grieving their death from overdose. Many of these families, are also left to raise their grandchildren. That gives us three generations that are struggling all at the same time!

1. PREVENTION! This means, not just telling kids, don't do drugs, obviously that has been ineffective. Let's inform and educate them – not just on the mental and physical effects of drugs and alcohol but we should be educating them on mental HEALTH. We should encourage compassion, understanding and cooperation. Positive reinforcement and supporting each other regardless of our differences. We should also be practicing what we preach! Modeling this behavior is the best educator.
2. There are still barriers to those trying to access treatment, especially medical detox. Although laws and amendments have been passed – few hospitals are following the “new” protocols. Friends of Recovery wrote an “ER Survival Guide” for people to bring to emergency departments but we need to educate and inform all those employees of ED to know these facts so people seeking treatment can get it.

*Those without insurance, or adequate insurance to access proper treatment are still those who suffer and return to using or drinking at greater numbers.
3. Length of Treatment, I realize this is an insurance issue or a financial issue, because our current “10-14 day” approval for insurance coverage for inpatient treatment is, in my humble opinion a tragedy bordering on criminal. Statistics prove this out with those who have been to six or more inpatient treatment centers. It sets them up for failure and compounds their feelings of failure and hopelessness! Removing the drug or substance from the user and them getting pass the physical withdrawal is just the beginning, they are raw and in need of finding the root issue of what brought them to use in the first place. Leaving after only ten days leaves them ill equipped to navigate their new sober life. They need to relearn how to live a life of recovery which needs tools, support, education and compassion.
4. Educating the user, their family and the community on a whole regarding mental health and substance use – we need more, in schools – a statewide evidence-based curriculum in schools k-12, public service announcements, resource materials made available everywhere. Media Campaigns.

5. Shutting down the Patient Brokers and others who take advantage of those seeking treatment and their families MUST be stopped and prosecuted. Much of this would not be an issue if our communities had better access to resources and information.
6. Regulation of Sober Homes or Transitional Housing. If we are going to support those in Recovery than this regulation is a basic human right. Everyone deserves the right to a safe and healthy environment, especially those who are more vulnerable.

We should be celebrating those courageous enough to ask for help and showing compassion, understanding and supporting them and their families as their success affects us all in the community. Let us Spread **Hope** to those who feel hopeless. Thank you for your time today.

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