

## State House Testimony

### **This is my written testimony in favor of House Bill 2026 H-8417**

Since my mid teenage years I've had symptoms of Schizophrenia, a lifelong and chronic health condition that often results in lifelong disability. There were suicide attempts, hospitalizations, brushes with law enforcement and the rather too common plethora of associative disabling features commonly found with this illness.

Over time, as I burned bridges with friends and even family members, I became one of the many homeless individuals you see today in Rhode Island. My state of well-being was markedly diminished, trying to grow my matted hair long, unbathed, and living alone in a tent in the Snake Den State Park in Smithfield. It was a rare month that I said 500 words to anyone back in the year of 2004, and lasting for just short of a two year duration into 2026 until I was involuntarily committed to the State Hospital in Cranston for nearly one-year in that facility. As I was getting ready to be released, I was asked where I would like to be situated and as a resident of Providence since the age of 6, I took a gamble and asked to be located in Kent County. It was a very fortuitous choice on my part as I became associated with Thrive Behavioral Health as a result.

This is where my marked turn around can be considered as begun. I will call it a three-legged stool method of rehabilitation. The first leg of the stool was housing, the second leg of the stool would be medications, and the final leg was Hillsgrove Clubhouse, where I could be part of something larger, or at a bare minimum have socialization.

Socialization is important as I received real-time feed back on how I was doing from moment to moment, month to month and so forth. Hillsgrove is based on a strength based model that was so markedly different from anything else that I've ever experienced on the Behavioral Health field. There are plenty of programs that will work on

your weaknesses, but when it comes to strengths? These programs fall flat compared to Clubhouse.

Where has Hillsgrove gotten me to, assessing my strengths? I am a member of Thrives Board of directors for close to 15 years, for nearly a decade a very active member of a Unitarian Church in East Greenwich (the faith I was born into), 21 years sober, A URI Master Gardener, a former volunteer at Thrive in the Health Information Department (where I got to meet Rep. David Bennet!) And a faculty member of Clubhouse International, which means I travel to other parts of the Country where I take part in accreditation visits to assess how the out-of-state Clubhouse in other States live up to the Clubhouse International Standards. It's an important position as in many states, if a Clubhouse is not consistent with the Clubhouse Standards, they may not receive Medicaid monies. Hillsgrove is an accredited Clubhouse and that means we are evidence based as a "best practice" in ensuring quality opportunities for members to Thrive.

Thank you for your patience in considering this Bill H 8417.  
Please, please see to it that it passes.

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