

Testimony of Eric Spofford

Good morning,

My name is Eric Spofford and it is an honor and a privilege to be here. I am the Chief Executive Officer of two substance abuse treatment programs in New Hampshire and have a third opening up early next year.

I'm also in long term recovery from opiate and other drug addiction. I've been sober since December 7th, 2006.

I'd like to share some of my personal experience with the opiate epidemic. In the late 90's a drug called OxyContin was marketed as a non addictive pain killer. This drug was an opiate, the same class of drug as heroin with a similar potency. It had a time release coating on it that was easily removed by moistening it and rubbing it off, making OxyContin a highly abusable and addictive drug.

In 1999 I was a teenager and experimenting with drugs and alcohol. A friend that I grew up with since first grade came over with a 20 milligram pill. We crushed it up and snorted it. It was the most euphoric thing I had ever experienced and I fell in love instantly. The next day all I wanted to do was more. I had no idea that my life had just changed forever.

What started as recreational use quickly turned into daily use and addiction. My tolerance for the drug became increasingly stronger. I dropped out of high school and shortly after graduated into using heroin, as most opiate addicts do. Before I knew it, it was too late.

Through 6 years of opiate addiction I did and experienced many things I'm not proud of. I committed crime to support my habit, got in legal trouble, was homeless, overdosed 5 times, and was a burden on society.

I attempted to achieve recovery many times before I finally did. But on the morning of December 7 nine years ago I was done for good.

Since then I've been in recovery I've been able to accomplish a lot. I'm a man of integrity today, a good friend, son, boyfriend, and father. I'm respected in my community and recently I won the business of the year award from the chamber of commerce. At every opportunity possible I'm of service, especially when it comes to combating the heroin epidemic.

In 2008 I started a program called The Granite House, a men's sober living home that quickly grew into a nationally recognized extended care program. Recently I opened a residential inpatient treatment center called New Freedom Academy and I have another inpatient facility called Green Mountain Treatment Center opening in early 2016.

I also own several other businesses in the construction and real estate space. I've created close to a hundred jobs in my home state of New Hampshire and I have paid my fair share of taxes along the way.

I tell you all of this because 9 years ago I was a man that appeared hopeless. I was a guy that was hard to like, I created a lot of problems everywhere I went because of my addiction, and because of the stigma associated with this disease most people had given up on me. Supporting addicts in their recovery process can have far greater benefit than just to them and their lives. We are some of the most intelligent and creative people that I have ever met and have the potential to do so much in this world, although it often doesn't appear so.

I have witnessed the opiate epidemic spiral out of control for a long time. The solution must be comprehensive with prevention and treatment.

In the last several years fentanyl has become widely available on the streets. It is a synthetic opiate that is 50 times more powerful than heroin and much cheaper. The dealers are cutting their heroin with it or selling it in the place of heroin, for greater profits. This has created an inconsistency of potency in the drugs that are on the street and it is killing people. I've buried more people of drug overdoses in the last two years than I have in all the years before combined. On average I know of 2 to 4 people that die a week.

Creating harder sentencing laws for the distribution and trafficking of fentanyl is incredibly important. This drug is a serial killer and so are the people selling it. They see the carnage it creates and keep selling it despite how many people are dying.

Also important is the availability of naloxone, the life saving overdose reversal drug. The symptoms of the disease of addiction are ugly and make addicts hard people to like. But the question we need to ask ourselves is, do they deserve to die because of their disease? I overdosed 5 times and was revived with this drug. Without it I would be dead and my life would have never had any meaning.

We must have better prevention systems in our schools. Young people experimenting with drugs is nothing new. What is new is that what is available to them is heroin and will change their like forever and they don't even know it. We need to educate our children on the truth of opiates and the effects it will have on them and their peers.

Treatment availability is incredibly important. If we can support addicts from being in active addiction to getting into the recovery process we will start to gain traction on this epidemic. Providing treatment for people with this disease is far less expensive than incarcerating them and so much more effective. People do need to be held accountable for their actions. However putting addicts in prison and expecting them to be different when they get out is of the same mentality as locking up a diabetic and expecting them to not have diabetes when released. The disease of addiction does not respond to punishment.

I sincerely appreciate your attention to this matter. Thank you for your time.