

**Testimony before the Senate Committee on
Commerce and Workforce Development.**

3/25/2009

Chair Rosenbaum, Committee members:

My Name is John Atten. I am a recovering heroin addict, and a survivor of homelessness.

I support Senate Bill 200 because this will bring to Oregon the potential to deliver statewide a model of coordinated housing and services similar to that which has served me, and thousands of others, so very effectively.

There are many in the recovering community who will offer the wisdom that recovery is a PROCESS, not an EVENT. So it is with addiction. So it is with homelessness.

In the course of a fifteen year addiction to heroin, I have had many attempts at treatment, for the judge, for my girlfriend, for my family, for everyone but myself. In all of these cases, I was eventually sent back to where I started, to the same old friends, same community, and same bad habits. There came a point ~~by~~ which I no longer had the resources to sustain a normal existence. I was homeless. I had lost my friends, my family, my job, and any sense of the integrity with which I was raised. I wanted desperately to stop, but I didn't know how.

Where I came from, to get on methadone required a wait of six to eight weeks. To enter detox, I had to somehow show that I would have a treatment bed when I got out. To get a treatment bed required insurance, and another waitlist. To get even the basic state health plan was another six to eight week wait, several appointments, and reams of paperwork. Oh, and they wanted to mail me the information. **I was very sick, addicted, and homeless, and I was unable to manage this level of complexity in order to get help.**

In desperation, I called Hooper Detox in Portland. I described my situation, and they asked if I could be there at 7:30 the next morning. After 12 days of acute withdrawal, I was enrolled immediately in treatment, and in the Central City Concern Recovery Mentor Program. I was given the key to a room in the old Danmoore building, where I stayed during 90 + days of treatment.

The Danmoore provided a clean and sober community of people who shared a common purpose; to live again, to recover. The mentor program offered a guide who had been there before, and who would hold me accountable as I negotiated the trials of early recovery. From there, I was enrolled in CCC's Worksource Program, where I was given the tools to leverage my existing work skills into the start of a new career.

Today I am the Occupancy & Compliance Manager for all of Central City Concern's housing, totaling over 1300 affordable units. In this capacity, I work extensively with Oregon Housing and Community Services to ensure the effective delivery of CCC's housing model to some of the most challenging, and hardest to house populations in Portland.

Closing

I present my story today in order that you might see what can be accomplished by pairing housing with a coordinated continuum of services. For most like me, there usually develops a window in which the horror, and misery, of where we find ourselves overshadows the fear of the unknown. The fear of asking for help, and the fear of facing the wreckage we have created, in our own lives and the lives of others. But ultimately, at a moment when I became willing, the availability of treatment, employment services, and safe, supportive housing were key to becoming who I am today.

I am here today as a concerned citizen, a registered voter, and a member of the recovering community. But most important to me, I represent the person who can't be here, because the underlying cause of their homelessness has not yet been addressed.

My name is John Atten. I put a needle in my vein **for the last time on October 31, 2003. I have been clean for One Thousand Nine-Hundred and Sixty-Nine days** due to the efforts of people such as yourselves, and others, who believed that my addiction, and my homelessness were not permanent conditions.

I appreciate your time today, and all the good work you do. I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me.