

Timothy Bjornson

District 21-02

Senate Bill NO. 2166

My name is Tim. I am an addict. My journey of addiction started when I was 16. I had a great upbringing but that didn't stop me from wanting to chase the world I was sheltered from. I was rebellious and I ran with a bad crowd. I started abusing my ADHD medication. I partied with my friends on weekends. I saw nothing wrong with it at the time. I didn't think that these choices would lead to over a decade of self-destruction, broken relationships, and legal trouble.

When I was 19, I found myself in a situation where I was given a choice. Use meth to prove I wasn't a nark or get shot. I did what they wanted me to do. I was hooked right away. Over the next decade I went through hell and back several times over. There were times that I would fight to stay off the hard drugs. I tried everything I could think of. Relocation didn't work, blocking phone numbers of using friends didn't work, and willpower alone wouldn't keep me clean. In 2016 I caught my first felony possession charge. I was put on probation. Now I HAD to stay clean. Nothing I had tried in the past worked. I needed to try something new. So, I went to an NA meeting at Lighthouse Church. I didn't know it at the time, but my childhood pastor was now the pastor of this church. I caught up with him and told him some of my story. He started to explain to me what Lighthouse was about. He invited me to other church functions and right away I found an area where I could be of service with the church band. I started going to recovery meetings and making new friends that would be positive influences in my life.

When Lighthouse became a Free Through Recovery provider, I was still on probation, so I signed up. At the time I was not doing well. I knew I needed some extra support. While receiving services I was in a cycle of relapse, jail, rehab, and back into recovery. My Peer Support and Care Coordinator and the extended support system I had at Lighthouse never gave up on me. Not even when I had given up on myself. Every time I came back broken and defeated, I was welcomed back with open arms and no judgement. That to me is one of the best things about Lighthouse. Addicts tend to give up on themselves when they are spiraling towards rock bottom. Society tends to view addicts as lepers as they were viewed 2000 years ago. They see an unclean lost cause and turn their backs on them. Lighthouse is staffed by people who know how it feels to be that broken individual that society has written off. Having so many people that were always there to remind me that I am more than my hurts, habits, and hang-ups and that my life is worth fighting for was crucial. The support I received there inspired me to help others.

On February 12th of 2021 I was arrested. Since that day I have remained clean and sober. I entered an intensive long term rehab program. Once I was back out in society for several months, I was offered a job as a peer support specialist. I have been working for Lighthouse since May of 2022. I work with people who are going through struggles that I have been through and overcame. I often hear our participants say that they don't know what they would do without us. I recall saying the same thing to my peer support. These programs offer a very necessary level of care that so many people need to overcome their life struggles. I would likely be dead or in prison right now if it wasn't for the love and support, I found in these programs when I was struggling. That's why I joined in this fight. Nobody

should be left to suffer from mental health issues, or substance use disorders. But sadly, they do. There is an epidemic in this country that has claimed so many lives. I've lost count of how many friends I lost to overdose or suicide. My mission in life is to fight for those that are still here.

This cause doesn't stand a chance without programs like the ones we at Lighthouse work with. Since I started this job, I have watched men and women start over with nothing, find employment, then housing and a vehicle. I've seen parents reunited with their children. A few months ago, I had the honor of presenting one of my participants with his one-year sobriety chip. I have seen people completely transform their lives with the help of these programs. It is my hope and prayer that through our stories you will see the value in the work we do at Lighthouse. We are a small organization in need of your help to continue helping people. Thank you for letting me share my story with you today.