



Emily Birckhead  
1116 Smith St.  
Charleston, WV 25301

March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024

The Honorable Senator Shelley Moore Capito  
500 Virginia Street East  
Suite 950  
Charleston, WV 25301

Senator Capito,

My name is Emily Birckhead and I'm the executive director of the West Virginia Alliance of Recovery Residences (WVARR). Our organization is contracted by the West Virginia Department of Health Services to administer a certification process for recovery residences based on nationally recognized best practiced standards and ethical principles established by the National Alliance of Recovery Residences (NARR). Since our inception in 2018, WVARR has sought to facilitate access to safe, high quality recovery housing for people with substance use disorders through certification, training, technical assistance, advocacy, and capacity expansion.

Recovery Residences serve a vital role in the Substance Use Disorder (SUD) continuum of care. More than half of people who receive treatment without aftercare will relapse within the first 90 days. Recovery residences provide a safe and sober living environment for folks to continue working on their recovery post-treatment in a community of their peers. They are connected to meaningful employment, attend mutual support meetings, develop valuable life skills like financial management and parenting, and acquire the tools they need to become healthy, productive, contributing members of society.

Because recovery residences are not considered a billable service, most are sustained through public and private grants and program fees charged to the residents. While those program fees are necessary to keep recovery residences afloat, they can present significant barriers to residents who need the services the most. In West Virginia, nearly 70% of the residents served in our state's recovery residences in 2023 had an income of less than \$12,490 per year. Although 94% of residents served were of working-age, most were unemployed when they entered recovery housing, having been in treatment, incarcerated, or experiencing homelessness. Additionally, 84% of residents were parents, with 59% having children 17 and younger.



Thanks to your leadership, the Safe SHORES Act has allowed us to implement a historic West Virginia Recovery Housing Voucher Program, which covers the cost of recovery residence program entry fees for indigent residents that agree to participate in WVARR-required outcomes and data collection efforts. This innovative program greatly reduces financial barriers to safe and stable recovery housing and allows us to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the services provided. Vouchers cover the first 45-days of resident stays, with typical lengths of stay averaging between 4-7 months, offering them a hand-up but not a hand-out. Most importantly, these vouchers help get West Virginians with substance use disorder back on track, back to work, and reunited with their families.

I am extremely grateful for your dedication to the people of West Virginia, especially those with substance use disorders. I encourage your continued support and the reauthorization of the Safe SHORES Act so that our state, and many others, can continue this important and meaningful initiative in the coming years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Emily Birckhead".

Emily Birckhead