

Good afternoon,

Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair, and esteemed members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

My name is Michelle Marshall, I am a woman in long term recovery from opioids. I am currently employed at the Frederick County Health Department as the Peer Outreach Response Coordinator and supervisor for the COAST and Frederick Health Hospital peers. I come to you today with my personal story that spanned over 25 years of active addiction, multiple treatment centers, and ultimately me not wanting to live anymore.

In 2010 I experienced an OD from Opioids at that time Narcan was not readily available and I always used alone. My son witnessed this traumatic event and ultimately I lost custody of him that day. You see I had already been I/O treatment 9 times, I was completely bankrupt emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

I was always against buprenorphine and was taught a rigid way of sobriety where Bup and other medications for opioid use disorder were not openly accepted. I was uneducated and full of fear just trying to find out “where I fit in”.

When I “came to” from that OD on 12/20/2010 I was so angry I was still alive and utterly hopeless. I knew I had just caused my son and family so much pain and I was so tired of trying. I was admitted to the behavioral health unit where I met a physician who took the time to educate me on Buprenorphine and advised me that I would probably die without starting Bup this time. So I had a decision to make feeling horrible from the withdrawal symptoms, he convinced me to just try it, so I did. Buprenorphine alleviated the symptoms I was experiencing almost immediately. It allowed me to not have the fight or flight response to want to get high and for me that was huge. The obsession and compulsion to use gone ... I had the ability to actively listen and made a decision during that stay to just follow all recommendations from the experts who were treating me. They cared more about me than I did at that time.

For me Buprenorphine was the missing piece to my recovery journey puzzle. I too had heard that I may just be replacing one drug for another so I stayed vigilant during my treatment. This was not the case for me Bup did not make me feel “high” what it did was allow me to feel normal enough to participate in my treatment and finally invest in myself to commit to sobriety. I engaged in step down treatment and continued to follow through with all recommendations and suggestions.

For me, my treatment plan assisted me with tapering off the medication with little to NO side effects. Absolutely nothing like the effects of heroin / opioids.

Buprenorphine combined with treatment, and a strong sober network not only changed my life but honestly the lives of so many. After completing a halfway house I was able to regain custody of my son and begin to rebuild our relationship, be a mother, a daughter, and participate in life. Buprenorphine played a pivotal role in my ability to get a job in the field, and I have been blessed to meet and assist countless individuals find their own pathway to recovery without judgement. That's the cornerstone in recovery "you have to give it away to keep it" and I'm so very grateful to be alive today and honored to share my story with you.

Thank you for all you do!

Michelle M.