

Statement of J. Paul Molloy – CEO, Oxford House, Inc.

My name is J. Paul Molloy. I am cofounder and CEO of Oxford House, Inc. – the 501[c][3] corporation that serves as the umbrella organization over the more than 1,800 Oxford Houses. I am also a recovering alcoholic who has been sober since 1975 – the year we started the first Oxford House™ in Silver Spring, Maryland where the central office of Oxford House™ is still located.

My remarks will focus on the success of Oxford House in fostering long-term recovery without relapse for alcoholics and drug addicts and those with co-occurring mental illness, many of whom had been incarcerated prior to entering an Oxford House and have remained out of the justice system. I believe that Oxford House it is uniquely beneficial to individuals re-entering society after incarceration. It works and it reduces recidivism. The fact that the Oxford House program works for ex-cons was documented as early as 1996, when Edward M. Read, a US Probation Officer for the US District Court in DC, published his book, *Partners in Change*. The book includes a section entitled, Oxford House – A Workable ‘Geographic Cure,’ in which he concludes that his best outcomes came when he could get a client into an Oxford House.¹ Those clients remained clean and sober and did not return to criminal activity. Over the years since, many more probationers and parolees have lived in Oxford Houses.

Each Oxford House is a self-run, self- supporting recovery home that operates in accordance with the conditions of a charter granted (free) by Oxford House, Inc. to the groups of recovering individuals starting a new Oxford House. The charter requires that: (1) the group run the House democratically according to the Oxford House Manual[©]; (2) each resident pay his or her equal share of rent and household expenses; and (3) the group agree to immediately expel any member who relapses. Started with one Oxford House in 1975, currently there are over 1,800 individual Oxford Houses with over 15,000 recovery beds. All houses are single sex and all houses are rented from private landlords in

good neighborhoods. Oxford House, Inc., the umbrella organization, employs outreach workers, all of whom are in recovery and have lived in an Oxford House, to help groups start new Oxford Houses, teach the residents the system of operation and help maintain quality control. Oxford House, Inc. operates on a budget of about \$5 million; funding comes from government, foundations, and individual contributors, including residents of Oxford Houses who voluntarily contributed over \$400,000 last year to support expansion in states without government or foundation support. A copy of the latest annual report and much more information can be found on the Oxford House website (www.oxfordhouse.org).

Oxford House expansion began in earnest following enactment of a couple of Federal legislative provisions, a U. S. Supreme Court decision, and the showing of a very positive CBS *60 Minutes* program segment on Oxford House. The federal 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act contained §2036, a provision that called for states to create \$100,000 start-up loan funds, under which groups of six or more recovering individuals could receive a loan up to \$4,000 to rent a single-family house and establish an Oxford House. In 2011, Dr. Jerome Jaffe, M.D., Drug Czar in the Nixon Administration which began the federal funding of alcoholism and drug addiction treatment, characterized the effect of §2036 as follows: “What the Oxford Houses have done is just short of miraculous. Dollar for dollar, I can think of no federal government investment that has yielded so great a return for our country and for those whose lives have been all but destroyed by drugs and alcohol.”

Also, the 1988 Amendments to the Federal Fair Housing Act included ‘handicap’ as a protected class under that Act. OHI relied on that amendment in fighting NIMBY cases brought by neighbors. Ultimately, the U. S. Supreme Court supported Oxford House in the case of *City of Edmonds, WA v. Oxford House, Inc.* (514 US 725; 1995). This decision effectively stymied the NIMBY barrier to group homes for those in recovery.² That case and others by OHI paved the way for re-entry recovery housing to avoid discrimination by landlords, localities or insurance companies.

Following a 1991 favorable CBS “60 Minutes” segment about Oxford House, the DePaul University Center for Community Research took an interest in scientific study of Oxford House. With NIDA and NIAAA support, DePaul has published over 175 articles in academic journals.³ In 2011, SAMHSA listed Oxford House™ on the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices [NREPP].⁴

One researcher has found that, among recovering individuals going to the same number of 12-step meetings, the group living in an Oxford House™ gained self-efficacy four times faster than the control group⁵. The duties and responsibilities required within the Oxford House system of democratic operation makes a big difference. The residents elect five house officers, hold weekly business meetings, pay all the household expenses, expel any resident who relapses and vote in new residents to fill vacancies. There is no time limit on how long an individual can live in an Oxford House as long as the resident stays clean and sober and pays his or her equal share of House expenses. Some residents stay a few months and others many years. There is no staff in an Oxford House; the residents themselves run the House and they all benefit from the experience. Residents thereby avoid the dependency referred to by George Vaillant in his landmark book, *The Nature of Alcoholism*.⁶ While many residents attend aftercare programs and many report regularly to probation officers, within their Oxford House, they are equal members of a self-run, self-supported responsible group of residents.

During 2014, 30,116 individuals lived in Oxford Houses with only 5,530 [16.7%] expelled because of relapse. Of all the residents living in Oxford Houses in June 2014, 76% had done jail or prison time averaging 11 months incarceration. For these individuals, Oxford House living makes a big difference. The basic egalitarian structure of Oxford Houses makes Oxford House living uniquely beneficial for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts coming back to society from incarceration. The democratic structure of Oxford House and the diversity of the residents in each Oxford House are key to successful integration back into society. Residents going into an Oxford House following

incarceration don't find themselves in a staff-led house with only re-entry individuals. Residents in an Oxford House come from varying backgrounds and not all have been incarcerated – in fact, at least one Oxford House has simultaneously housed an ex-con and a sitting judge. Every Oxford House is a mix of 'has-beens' and 'never-weres' and this makes a difference. When I lived in an Oxford House™, I was a 'has been.' I was a well-educated lawyer who had been Republican Counsel to the Senate Commerce Committee but one fellow Oxford House resident had never gone beyond the third grade. We helped each other become comfortable in long-term sobriety.

Entering or re-entering the workforce is a major challenge for many individuals returning from incarceration. This not a major problem in an Oxford House. Many residents come into an Oxford House with neither job experience nor leadership skills. Since Oxford House residents have to pay an equal share of the House rent and household expenses, all residents have to get a job. Fortunately, other members of the Oxford House community usually know where there are job openings so there is a built-in job network. Furthermore, many residents have no leadership skills, but all residents serve in House offices at various times and learn the leadership skills that will serve them well throughout life.

In several states, Oxford House, Inc. has created and/or participated in re-entry programs that have been very successful. In these programs, Oxford House outreach workers or residents make presentations about Oxford House at prisons to prisoners who are soon to be released. Prisoners can submit applications for Oxford House residency and be interviewed by phone by House members while still in prison so that, once accepted into an Oxford House, they have a place to go directly upon release. Usually someone from Oxford House will pick the accepted applicant up from the facility upon release and go directly to the Oxford House. Individuals released from prison who go back to where they used to live, tend to take up with old friends and old behaviors. Oxford House residency eliminates that behavior.

Expansion of the network of Oxford Houses requires three factors: [1] the availability of start-up loans, [2] technical assistance funds to permit Oxford House, Inc. to send trained, supervised outreach workers to help groups start new Oxford Houses, and [3] clusters of houses to create mutually supportive chapters. Oxford House has the greatest presence in seven states in which the State government provided this support. [See FY 2014 Annual Report] Oxford House development not only reduces recidivism but is a most cost-effective way to do so. In September 2012, the New York Times ran a series of articles about alternative prison housing in New Jersey.⁷ Two operators maintained about 3,500 beds at an annual cost to the state of \$105,000,000. Oxford House has developed 120 Oxford Houses in New Jersey with 957 recovery beds and has an annual \$292,000 contract with the state to provide three trained outreach workers and to manage a start-up loan program. That is an average of \$305/year per Oxford House bed versus over \$30,000/ per bed in alternative prison housing

I urge the Task Force to consider the following recommendations that would foster expansion of the network of Oxford Houses and support research into the long-term effectiveness of alternative forms of housing following incarceration.

1. Support amendment of the Group Homes for Recovering Substance Abusers section of the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act [42 U.S.C. 300x-25] to [a] increase the cap on start-up loans from \$4,000 to \$6,000 and [b] make clear that those who relapse shall be immediately expelled.
2. Encourage DOJ to fund Oxford House™ development in communities with large groups of persons returning from incarceration.
3. Encourage DOJ and NIH to support longitudinal research examining the effect of Oxford House living and other alternatives on recidivism rates.

Thank you.

¹ Edward M. Read, *Partners in Change*, Hazelden, Center City, MN, 1995. P.144 *et. seq.*

² In the *City of Edmonds, WA v. Oxford House, Inc.* [514 US 725; 1995] See www.oxfordhouse.org under “Publications/Legal” for a more detailed discussion of the legal protection afforded Oxford Houses.

³ See www.oxfordhouse.org under “Publications/Evaluations/DePaul” then click on “DePaul Research Team/ Publications” for a full list of articles.

⁴ See <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov> and enter “Oxford House” in the box entitled “Find an Intervention”. The Oxford House Model is the only recovery house program listed on the NREPP.

⁵ [Majer, J.M., Jason, L.A., & Olson, B.D. \(2004\). Optimism, abstinence self-efficacy, and self-mastery among Oxford House residents: A comparative analysis of personal resources. *Assessment*, 11, 57-63.](#)

⁶ George E. Vaillant. *The Natural History of Alcoholism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995 – This is an update of Vaillant’s 1983 landmark edition.

⁷ NYT, June 16, 17, and 18, 2012 editions – Three part series “*Inside New Jersey’s Halfway Houses.*”