

March 16, 2023 – In Support of HF 1172

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members. My name is Randy Anderson I'm a person living in long term recovery and what that means to me is, I haven't used drugs, alcohol, or any mood-altering substance since January 9, 2005. I'm a state licensed alcohol & drug counselor, a peer recovery specialist supervisor and a formerly incarcerated individual due to drug related offenses.

I could sit here today and tell you about the multiple times I've been disqualified by DHS background studies and the multiple set asides I've had to complete. Instead, I'm going to tell you how I felt, when I was escorted out of the building where my recovery journey began in 2004 and in 2016 was working as a full-time addiction counselor hoping to give other men the gift that was given to me, a life free from the grips of a disease that most certainly would have killed me.

It was late August 2016 and I had just settled in my chair at my desk to start my day when my phone rang and the program's division director requested that I come to his office immediately. When I got to the office the division director and my supervisor were sitting at the table in his office and asked me to close the door behind me and have a seat. The division director handed me a piece of paper and said I need to read this. I read the paper; however, I was very confused about what I was reading. I remember saying this must be a mistake I've already been cleared by DHS several times during my two internships and when I worked as a technician for this program. I was then told by one or both of them, "if it is a mistake, I'm sure we can clear it up quickly, however, for today we are going to have to ask you to get what personal belongings you need from your office and leave the premises right away." I remember being very emotional as I was escorted back to my office by my supervisor to gather my stuff and then escorted out the front door. I was in utter shock the very same building that I once called home and attribute to saving my life was a place, I no longer felt welcomed. Thus, beginning my journey to attempt to fix a very broken system that seems to exclude the most qualified.

Since that day I have assisted dozens of others with the set aside process. Many have been successful, and some have not, like my friend Rachel.

Rachel was at one time a hard-working registered nurse. After losing twins Rachel turned to drugs and alcohol to self-medicate. During the 5 years that she struggled with substances she had committed many crimes to feed her addiction. Rachel eventually got the help and support she deserved to stop using and start living. Since achieving recovery Rachel has been working on getting back to nursing and as many of us know that can be a long and difficult process. In the meantime, Rachel had decided that working with people seeking recovery would be rewarding for her and that her lived experience with addiction could definitely help another. She applied to work as a technician for a substance use disorder program here in the metro. After being hired in October of 2021 of course she received that dreaded document of disqualification. That employer had decided that they would continue to let her work while completing the set aside. Rachel worked diligently over the next few weeks to complete her 147-page set aside. Yes 147 pages is what she ended up with due to all the required and redundant paperwork. Rachel submitted her set aside to DHS and unfortunately in January of 2022 she was denied and terminated from that job.

The substance use disorder services field in Minnesota faces massive workforce shortages and it's time we let those most qualified get to work. Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

*Kind regards,*

*Randy Anderson, RCPF, LADC*

*Person in Long Term Recovery*

*Est. January 10, 2005*

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*"The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why." – Mark Twain.*