

Speech – Senate President Therese Murray
Recovery Homes Collaborative of Massachusetts – Annual Gratitude Luncheon
Thursday, September 17, 2009 at 12:15 p.m.
Florian Hall, Hallet Street, Dorchester

(As Prepared)

Thank you, Bob.

It's a great honor to receive this award. It really is, and I appreciate it.

But I have to tell you ... This is about all of you and the work you do every single day to help people trying to overcome addictions.

You're the ones on the front lines, and without you we lose the battle.

But instead, we fight to help people achieve abstinence and regain their independence, self-worth and dignity. That is important and difficult work, and you should be commended.

It's about Senator Jen Flanagan – one of our freshman senators – who does a great job as Senate chairwoman of the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Committee.

It's about Senator Jack Hart. ... He continues to represent the First Suffolk District with great passion and gusto, and I know he supports your efforts.

And if we're talking about passion and commitment, then we all know that no one has done more for this cause on Beacon Hill than Senator Steven Tolman.

As Senator Tolman always reminds us, between 2002 and 2007 the Commonwealth lost 78 soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the same time period, 3,265 Massachusetts residents died of opiate-related overdoses.

That's a staggering statistic that really drives home the challenge of addiction.

It means we are losing Massachusetts citizens here at home at a rate 42 times greater than we are losing our soldiers in war.

In 2007, 645 Massachusetts residents died from opioid-related overdoses. In that same year, the state paid for 202 people to go through detox 10 times or more.

Over the past four years, the total number of people who have gone through state-funded detox 10 times or more in a single year is 902.

Currently, the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, MassHealth and the uncompensated care pool contribute more than 75 percent of the dollars spent on substance abuse services in the Commonwealth.

Private insurance payments for substance abuse treatment decreased 11 percent from 1991 to 2001 while public payments increased by 68 percent during the same time period.

The fact is, we are experiencing a dramatic increase in drug abuse throughout the Commonwealth, but the Senate is working to improve services and ensure that the funding you need is there to help this vulnerable population.

In 2006, we secured a long-overdue rate increase for recovery homes from \$55/day to \$75/day. A crucial element in the continuum of care, recovery homes had not seen a rate increase for nearly a decade prior to 2006.

Additionally, the Massachusetts OxyContin and Heroin Commission was created during the 2007-2008 legislative session and is charged with looking into issues of addiction and substance abuse in the Commonwealth.

The 14-member Commission recently finished holding regular public hearings across the Commonwealth and plans to release a final report of its findings in the fall.

Recommendations from the Commission range from improving long-term treatment services, increasing funding for youth education programs, revamping the prescription monitoring program and improving treatment services to incarcerated individuals.

The Legislature also repealed the exemption on sales tax for alcohol, which should yield approximately \$92 million in revenue for the state to use on substance abuse related programs.

Studies show that underage drinking decreases when the alcohol tax increases.

The Legislature has also improved funding and support for the three Massachusetts Recovery High Schools.

Seventy-two percent of the youth referred to Massachusetts recovery high schools in the 2006-2007 academic year completed the school year.

This is a significant accomplishment considering the students' circumstances.

The Legislature also secured \$2.8 million in the FY10 budget for a pilot jail diversion program in the Commonwealth.

This program would allow for clinical assessment services and inpatient treatment for up to 90 days for non-violent, first-time offenders.

This is important because we all know the most effective path to recovery is through comprehensive, long-term commitment.

The Legislature has also provided additional funding for step-down recovery services.

All of these efforts will help, but we still need more effective treatment models to handle the changing issues in substance abuse.

For example, opiate dependency is vastly different from alcoholism, and it should be treated differently.

And though money is tight in the state budget, we are working to do all we can to improve services. ... And we can't do it without you.

So, let's keep working together and bring recovery to one person at a time.

Thank you for this special award today.

And thank you, again, for all your hard work and dedication.

You are making a difference, every day.

Thank you.

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