



April 5, 2019

Senator Richard Pan, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health  
State Capitol, Room 5114  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re. AB 325 (Hill) – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Pan,

I write on behalf of Consumer Watchdog to express our strong support of SB 325 (Hill), which will finally require the state of California to license and oversee outpatient substance use disorder treatment.

It shocks the conscience that treatment for a disease that afflicted almost 20 million American adults in 2017 remains unregulated. Patients seeking help for substance use disorder trust that the medical providers they turn to are licensed and overseen by the state. This legislature approved similar rules last year (SB 823 - Hill) for inpatient facilities. However patients seeking outpatient treatment, whether after inpatient treatment or because they may not have the resources or time to enter an inpatient facility, remain vulnerable to a lesser standard of care.

Southern California has become an addiction treatment destination, with more than 1100 rehab and treatment facilities in just four counties, known by some as the “Rehab Riviera.” Nearly anyone can open a treatment facility in California, and they have. The market has been flooded as insurance coverage of substance use treatment has expanded under state and federal laws. But as facilities expanded, standards did not. This lack of state oversight has resulted in widely reported fraud and fiscal abuse of third party payers, those seeking treatment, and the families of those who fell victim to these inadequate and unregulated fly-by-night services. My family suffered the consequences of this lack of oversight.

Imagine, if you can, watching your vibrant twenty-year-old son go off to rehab one afternoon, only to see his purple, stiff body in that rehab center the next morning. That’s exactly the horror I experienced after my son, Alex, sought treatment for opioid dependency at a rehabilitation center in Laguna Beach. Alex’s goal was to safely detox off of prescription pain medications, yet within two hours of arriving, his doctor prescribed Alex a lethal combination of medications that led to his death within hours.

According to several medical experts, the treatment Alex received fell well-below the standard of care and directly led to his death. Not only was he left unmonitored for more than seven

hours, but the combination of medications that Alex was prescribed and dispensed was excessive and unnecessary, did not follow any clearly documented clinical rationale, and did not follow evidence-based treatment guidelines for detoxification. The substandard care Alex received was shocking and life-ending, and even more unbelievable is that there was no accountability for his death. Seven years later, untouched by any oversight or accountability, Alex's doctor continues to operate rehabs in Orange County.

Opioid and other addictions shatter lives in California. The least we can do is to ensure that the facilities families like mine trust to help their loved ones get well meet minimum standards of evidence-based care.

Patients need and deserve SB 325's protections. Consumer Watchdog urges your support.

Sincerely,

Tammy Smick  
Board of Directors, Consumer Watchdog