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## **L.I.R.A.**

**Long Island Recovery Association**  
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### **Distinguished Members of this Assembly Committee,**

**The Long Island Recovery Association (LIRA) is a grassroots organization of individuals in recovery from addiction illnesses, their family members and friends who organized to advocate for fair and equitable treatment for chemically dependent individuals. I appear before you today representing LIRA, The Quality Consortium of Suffolk County (24 not-for-profit treatment and prevention providers) and other recovery advocates, as a staunch ally and friend of recovery who remains deeply concerned about the gross injustice and discriminatory practices against individuals in recovery from, or seeking help for, chemical dependency.**

**In response to question # 1, in many instances the archaic Rockefeller Drug laws are a clear, concrete example of the systemic societal discrimination those chemically dependent face on an everyday basis. Individuals suffering from addiction related illnesses are sick people, and in most cases not hard core criminals. Yet in the past, and still today, they are swept up and imprisoned unfairly for extensive periods of time.**

**While we recognize that those breaking the law must be accountable for their actions, we would add that the punishment must fit the crime. In some places, our criminal justice system now recognizes the wisdom of treating sick people accordingly and providing treatment and counseling that not only makes economic sense but is fair, just and humane, with the potential for turning lives around. Discrimination, however, continues to exist due to a fractured system of misinformation and some hardened laws that can limit options for judges.**

**In response to Question # 2, the proliferation of Drug Courts and Alternatives to Incarceration Programs have begun to address the issue in a more just and compassionate fashion. However, we are a long way from a uniform understanding and application of appropriate punishment or justice across our State. We believe that judges need to have the power of discretion when contemplating the specifics in drug related cases using an individual, case by case basis. Sentencing judges must be allowed to consider the circumstances and opt for alternatives to incarceration when so indicated. We know that treatment and education are usually more likely to result in a positive outcome. In addition, statistics show that mandated treatment is equally effective in recovery outcomes, and this option of "legal intervention" has the promise to make a significant impact by applying discretion, along with common sense, to initiate rehabilitation for chemically dependent individuals.**

**Question # 12 raises some interesting issues, as clearly those with alcohol or other drug use histories would benefit greatly from a time sensitive continuum of education, treatment, housing and support services which will keep them engaged in the recovery process, and thus less likely to return to criminal activity or the use of alcohol and other drugs.**

**We urge you to be the voice of reason and to recommend the adoption of pro-active approaches that will correct these glaring injustices and help individuals return to society and their families with a sense of hope and gratitude for the opportunity provided.**

**On behalf of LIRA, the Quality Consortium of Suffolk County, and recovery advocates across NY State, thank you for listening to our significant concerns related to the addiction recovery community.**

**Respectfully Submitted,**

*Mary Callan*

MARY CALLAN

*"Seeking equity, parity and recognition for Long Island's Recovery Community"*