

February 9, 2011

Glen Bradley (District 49) Glen.Bradley@ncleg.net
NC House of Representatives
300 N. Salisbury Street, Room 536
Raleigh, NC 27603-5925

Dear Mr. Bradley:

My name is Deborah Mastrodonato and I live in Youngsville, NC. You represent me and so I had to write you and tell you my story.

I am a former client of the Summit House program, and my daughter and I lived there from June, 2007 until we graduated in June, 2008. A member of the administration of Summit House Triangle recently wrote to me and let me know that Summit House is in jeopardy of losing its funding during the General Assembly. She asked me would I care to write a letter and encourage my representative to vote to continue this support. I jumped at the opportunity.

You see, Mr. Bradley, Summit House saved my life and saved my daughter, Payton's life. In June of 2007 I was looking down the dark road of the end, my self-destruction was almost complete. I was facing 2 years prison time for the last of many offenses. I knew this was the last road I would travel down – I knew there would be no more chances for me. I had suffered through decades of serious drug abuse and spent many years taking my loved ones hostage with my addiction. I wanted to give up. I was 43 years old, beat down, riddled with guilt and lost – unemployed and so sick I wanted to die. By that time I had been through five rehabs, and a hand full of halfway houses. My two year old daughter, Payton was in foster care and there was no one left who believed that I should ever be able to see her again. I had other opportunities but never saw the value and now I was too old. I was middle-aged and fell through the cracks. The people in my life that had always helped and supported me had given up hope that I could ever be healthy or clean and only believed that I would hurt my child through abandonment and negligence. No one thought I should be allowed to be a mother. For a long time, I agreed.

I was still standing on this road when Summit House accepted me as a client and picked me up from my fifth and final rehab. We stopped to pick up my daughter from foster care and went on to Raleigh. I knew that if I didn't do something to change my life right then and right there, I would lose my child, lose my family, and lose my life. Summit House gave me a simple choice – choose life or choose death. I could stay and work harder than I've ever worked before, or I could go to prison and leave my daughter to face a life alone in the system.

I chose life and chose my daughter and we both held on long enough to make a start. Summit House gave me the tools to a better life and I chose to pick them up. I was able

to start meaningful therapy to address the painful, buried issues that made self-destruction so inevitable for me. I completed a 12-week course in parenting through social services, and was able to obtain health care for myself and Payton. Payton was also in therapy (play therapy) and started daycare in a licensed facility. I dealt with my legal issues and was able to look for a job. I attended classes on how to interview for a job, I was taught how to deal with stress safely – I was taught how to feel for others, honor my child and trust my own abilities. I was taught how to forgive myself and how to give back. The most extraordinary thing that I learned to do was tell the truth. What do you think the chances are that I would be able to learn and do those things in prison?

The most important and most crucial element of this story is that Payton and I were able to DO IT TOGETHER. Only Summit House offered the safe environment we both needed to slowly form the oldest and most sacred human bond between mother and child. I learned how to fall in love with my daughter and obtained that unshakeable devotion to her safety and well-being, then committed myself to teach her how to be a credible human being.

Mr. Bradley, there are plenty of programs out there for adult men and women with substance abuse issues. I call them “treat ‘em and street ‘em”. They are 30-90 day programs that clean you up, teach you some 12-step principles, take you to several weekly meetings, tell you to do 90 meetings in 90 days and put you back out there, often into the arms of the toxic neighborhood you came from. A long-term, alternative sentencing residential program for non-violent women to live with their children to heal and grow is incredibly rare. Summit House was able to have the vision to understand that mothers who are given a chance to rehabilitate while living with and caring for their children were much more likely to succeed IN THE LONG RUN. They knew if the mother/child bond was strengthened and deepened, the women would find it intolerable to put their children at risk by picking up drugs again. Women in prison and children in foster care cost the state much, much more than giving them a place to grow and thrive together.

Summit House is the only program I have ever been in that stressed taking responsibility for your choices and for your children. I had to face the truth of what I was and the things that I had done in order to change my way of thinking. I owe my life to Summit House. Please don't take that lightly. Please do not take the funding away for this unique program. Please do not sentence other mothers and children to a life of anger, regret, self-loathing and isolation.

This program works, Mr. Bradley. I have been employed full time at a local Raleigh church since December 10, 2007 and have held down the same job for over three years. I am trusted to keep their books and be their secretary. I count many members of the congregation as my most trusted friends. I was given another chance because the Senior Pastor believed in me. He met with the Director of Summit House and after that discussion he felt comfortable giving me a chance. I receive no government funding and support myself. My daughter is in kindergarten and thriving. She can read and she can play. Her heart is silly and light. She is incredibly happy, good natured and most

importantly— she is secure. She is my hope for a much better future for our family. She is the only reason I was able to find the strength not to run and sit with my fear. Summit House is a tough program, have no doubt about that. Without Summit House, I would most likely be dead and my daughter would exist in a dark, silent, scary place – never knowing why Mommy left her alone. She would no doubt follow the same path as her mother, doomed to self—destruction, abuse and addiction. She wouldn't remember my face and never remember how much I loved her. Her heart would be a blank, as broken as most of her toys. Because of Summit House I was able to give her the gift of her own mother's love, joy and security. She is able to have a childhood. Please don't take that away.

Please be a champion for us, Mr. Bradley. There are mothers out there right now standing on that road who need you to support funding for Summit House. There are small children needing you right now to make the right choice. Nobody wins if the state has to foot the bill for both women and children who have no place else to go. Please give them a chance to change the outcome and find their strength together. If not, the mothers will live in prison, their memories fading of what it felt like to give love. They'll forget the warm weight of a baby in their arms. The children will spend years broken-hearted and terrified, abused and alone - belonging to no one. They will grow into a generation of soulless, empty and hopeless adults. They will be filled with rage and pain, happy to live off the system and expect nothing from life a life but apathy and despair.

I would be happy to talk with you or provide any documentation to validate who I am. I am a graduate of Summit House. I am an independent, responsible parent and a loving mother to a happy, healthy five year old girl. I am a trusted friend and employee. I am a taxpayer and a good neighbor. I am a miracle. Please do what you can to give the possibility of this happy ending to the other women and their children who need Summit House. Our community needs Summit House, and Summit House needs you.

Thank you,
Deborah Ann & Payton Noelle Mastrodonato