

Oral Testimony

of

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**Chairman, The Brent Shapiro Foundation for Drug Awareness
Los Angeles, California**

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II. Chairman, The Brent Shapiro Foundation for Drug Awareness

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**U. S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor/Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**

March 30, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the subject of the Fiscal Year 2007 appropriation for substance abuse. I come today as a parent to hopefully give a voice to the millions of families across the United States who have children suffering from the disease of alcohol and drug dependence.

Every person in America is affected by alcohol and drug dependence and its consequences - either personally, at home, in the workplace, as victims of crimes, and/or as a taxpayer. Now reaching epidemic proportions, this disease is an "equal opportunity" disease. It affects all ages from children to the elderly; the rich and poor alike; the educated and uneducated; male and female; and single individuals and families. For those that have this disease, it is a daily struggle that not only affects the individual but also those around them, magnifying the impact of this disease.

Alcohol and drug dependence exists when physical and behavioral problems are sufficient enough to interfere with an individual's life. It is an out of control disease that is ruining and taking the lives of our youth. Today, one in four deaths is attributable to alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use. One hundred thousand people die a year from alcohol-induced disorders. Twenty thousand people die a year from drug-induced problems. There are more deaths, illness, and disabilities from substance abuse than from any other preventable health condition and despite recent improvements in some usage trends, drug-related deaths have more than doubled since the early 1980s. The leading cause of death in young people aged 15 to 24 is accidents, especially car accidents, followed by homicide and suicide: in all three leading causes combined, half of the deaths of these children and adolescents are associated with alcohol and drug use at the time of death. Not surprisingly, kids in trouble with the law are also using alcohol and drugs: 4 out of 5 children and teens that end up in state juvenile justice systems are using alcohol and or drugs at the time of arrest.

As a parent and an attorney, I witnessed firsthand the deadliness of this disease. On October 9, 2005, my life and family were shattered. That evening my 25 year old son Brent went to a football game. At a party after the game, with eighteen months of sobriety under his belt, he thought he could experiment with alcohol. He drank beer at the game and had two drinks at the party, based on the trigger effects of this disease, he then took a half of a tab of Ecstasy. As a

result, he became severely ill and had difficulty breathing; however, because no one wanted to have his relapse recorded, no one called the paramedics. At 7:00 am the next morning, he stopped breathing and by the time the paramedics were called, it was too late. He arrived at the hospital in a coma and was buried a day and a half later. Brent was a man with a large and loving heart who was also a Dean's List student and an athlete, raised in a good home with two loving parents and a supporting younger brother. If this sounds like your family, it probably is.

After my son lost his battle, I formed The Brent Shapiro Foundation for Drug Awareness. Our mission is to raise awareness through education; remove the stigma and isolation associated with this disease by promoting an open and honest dialog; and work towards prevention including early identification of those at high risk. We intend to search for biological markers of alcohol and drug dependence, and study the apparent increased risk between common childhood problems such as ADHD, other learning disabilities and the susceptibility to this disease. We believe that increasing awareness is the first step to change – change in the way this disease is viewed; change in the way it is identified and prevented; change in the way people who have this disease are viewed by society; and change in treatment modalities. We want to build systems that support families and their children to prevent the disease of alcohol and drug dependence from occurring. Family-based interventions are needed before brain alterations occur and complete physical and emotional dependence is firmly entrenched.

Historically, the fight with this disease has been approached from two sides: the demand side, which includes prevention and treatment, and the supply side, which includes interdiction and law enforcement. However, these sides are not treated equally. In the proposed fiscal budget for 2007, 65% of monies spent will go to reducing the drug supply and only 35% will go to reducing the demand. The fact that we are planning on spending almost two-thirds of the allotted monies to reducing supply, would lead one to believe this approach has proven the most effective. Yet today, the supply of alcohol and drugs is greater than ever and they cost less than ever before. Alcohol and drugs are readily available right down to the local elementary school. The illegal drugs available today are growing in potency. Marijuana considered by some to be harmless is now 10-20 times more potent than it was in the 1960s. The problem is not limited to illegal drugs. Abuse of prescription drugs, such as Vicodin and Oxycontin is on the rise among American youth. The Internet has become an easy source of obtaining these prescription drugs. If you type in the word, "Vicodin," you will probably get over 500 sites from which you can order them without even a doctor's visit, and they are delivered right to your doorstep.

If our society is to attain reliable momentum in turning around the problems of alcohol and drug dependence – aggregate gains need to be demonstrated. As a society, we must evaluate the efficacy of all of our supply or demand efforts. Studies of effectiveness should be a requirement for any publicly funded effort: the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, National Institute on Drug Abuse and National Institute on Alcohol and Alcoholism are experts at coordinating such studies. Our Foundation's view is that aggregate gains will only occur with the development of a process that combines economy of scale with sustainability.

I am not a scientist, but I am a concerned and focused parent. Like so many parents I am aware that the problem of alcohol and drug dependence is not going away. History has taught us that we have not and will never be able to stop the supply of these drugs. The effort to turn the tide

on alcohol and drug dependence will only be won with both sides working in tandem. However, I do believe that the demand side is being short-changed and limited funds are hampering the efforts of those on the demand side of this equation.

It is our belief that prevention programs should work with parents via programs aimed at striking a balance between enhancing protective factors, such as parental involvement and reducing risk factors such as peers who use alcohol and drugs. We need to teach our children to deal with peer pressure. We need to work on eroding the youth culture's acceptance of everything from binge drinking to raves, where drugs are not only accepted but expected. On the weekends, hospital emergency rooms are filled with kids who overdosed or are victims of accidents involving drugs and alcohol. We at the Foundation believe that by engaging key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, children, teens, young adults, healthcare workers, while also reaching out to law enforcement will bear the greatest results.

We need every resource available to ease this situation. SAMSHA plays a critical role in researching and implementing programs for the prevention and treatment of substance dependence. I was extremely alarmed to learn that between 2001 and 2007 government funding for prevention programs decreased 21%. Awareness and prevention need to be more wholly supported, only then can we have a turnaround in the way this disease is viewed and treated. Please remember, this is a family disease, if even one family member has it the entire family suffers from it. Thank you for your time.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

ROBERT L. SHAPIRO

Robert Shapiro, the father of Brent Shapiro, is one of the most recognized attorneys in the world. He is currently a partner at the Los-Angeles based Law Firm of Christensen Miller, Fink, Jacobs, Weil, Glaser & Shapiro, LLP. He is the head of the firm's white-collar criminal defense section. He was admitted to the California State Bar in 1969.

A graduate of UCLA, he holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Finance. At Loyola Law School he was the recipient of two American Juris Prudence awards. He was both the winner of the Moot Court Competition and served as its Chief Justice. Mr. Shapiro clerked for Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office during his last year in law school. Upon graduation he accepted a position as a public prosecutor for two and a half years. He entered private practice in 1972 and gained a reputation for representing high profile individuals in criminal cases. In 1990 Mr. Shapiro became Of Counsel to the firm of Bushkin, Gaims, Gaines & Jonas. His practice expanded to include civil litigation. Upon the founding of the Christensen Miller firm, Mr. Shapiro became Of Counsel. In 1995 he became a named partner of the firm.

Mr. Shapiro was recently profiled in the New York Times as one of the nation's most prominent attorneys. His list of high profile cases includes the defense of O.J. Simpson, Christian Brando, and Robert Evans. He successfully represented the President of Mobil Oil Company charged with manslaughter resulting from a tank explosion. Less known but equally important is Mr. Shapiro's expertise in international law and civil litigation. He is a frequent guest on network and cable television shows and is called upon for his legal expertise. He is also a co-founder of Legalzoom.com that offers online legal document preparation.

Mr. Shapiro has written and lectured extensively on legal issues and procedures. He is the author of *For the Defense* (Loyola Law Review, November 1996), *The Search For Justice: A Defense Attorney's Brief on the O.J. Simpson Case* (1996), a New York Times Bestseller, and *When The Press Calls: A Lawyer's View* (California Litigation, Fall 1991) and the novel, *Misconception*. He was honored by the California State Bar Journal for having authored one of the ten best legal articles of the decade. He is the recipient of the pro-bono lawyer of the year from the State of Nevada. The Los Angeles Daily Journal has listed Mr. Shapiro as one of its 100 Super Lawyers. In his leisure time Mr. Shapiro is an avid sports fan supporting both the Lakers and the Kings. He is a passionate boxing fan as well as an amateur boxer. He resides in Los Angeles with his wife of 35 years, Linell, and his son, Grant.

DISCLOSURE

The Brent Shapiro Foundation for Drug Awareness has never received any funds from a Federal grant (or as a sub-grant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof).