

My name is David Woodworth, and I support the passing of HB 6684, an act concerning the delivery of mental health services. As a professional in the mental health field for over 5 years, certified Recovery Support Specialist, and a peer, these provisions are a welcome improvement to our state's mental health care system.

As a Residential Counselor for a Respite program of the Mental Health Association of Connecticut in Torrington, from 2007 to 2008, I witnessed, first hand, the recovery of individuals that were beat down, broken, and failed by the very system that was supposed to be helping them. People that are chronically homeless with chronic mental illness are among our state's most vulnerable population, and with access to Respite programs in times of critical need for these individuals, costly visits to emergency rooms and hospital-based services will be saved with pennies on the dollar.

As a person in recovery currently employed by the DMHAS-funded Prime Time House in Torrington, as a Rehabilitation Counselor, I am fully aware of the distinct advantage there is to hiring peers trained as Recovery Support Specialists to provide Peer Bridger Services. There are participants in the Prime Time House program that I first met while employed at the Respite program for the Mental Health Association. As a peer in recovery, I have the unique perspective of my own personal experiences with the mental health care system and special ability to engage people where they're at simply because at some point, I WAS exactly where they are at, and I empathize with their situation.

There were residents at Respite that I remember clearly having no hope, faith, or direction in their recovery. Completely isolated, disillusioned, lost, and virtually forgotten by the system in place serving them, simply by the grace of God and the teamwork of our Respite staff and the Prime Time Club House staff, have been able to get back on their feet, work toward gaining independence and housing in the community, and new hope and faith in their recovery. Peer Bridger has been shown to reduce hospitalizations in other states, Tennessee and Wisconsin, 71% and 44%, respectively. If peers with personal recovery experience such as myself are given the opportunity to serve in Peer Bridger roles, these stories of success will be replicated.

Advanced Directives are a highlight of person-centered recovery, enabling the best-case scenario to take place with its initiative to encourage people in recovery to prepare this legal document that specifies services, treatments and medications that work for them and designate a health care representative authorized to make decisions when they cannot do so. Advanced Directives are a kind of safety net put in place by the very person it is designed to protect tailored individually to his or her specific needs. To put it bluntly, Advanced Directives SAVES LIVES.

Thank you, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee for your support of HB 6684.