

March 4, 2015

Public Health Committee
Room 3000, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Attn: Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee

Re: Testimony in **Support of HB 5912 – AN ACT CONCERNING TRAINING IN MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS) PERSONNEL.**

My name is Dawn M. Roy, LCSW and I am a private practitioner and consultant in lower Fairfield County. I am writing this testimony in support of **HB 5912** in which the legislation proposes to require training in Mental Health First Aid for emergency medical services personnel.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an evidence-based 8 hour public education program that is currently being offered throughout CT and the nation. The MHFA for Public Safety course is taught to help law enforcement, first responders, corrections officers and other public safety professionals better understand mental illnesses and addictions. In addition, it provides training that helps to deescalate incidents so they can respond to mental health related calls appropriately without compromising safety. The goals of mental health first aid for public safety include: defuse crises, promote mental health literacy, combat stigma of mental illness, enable early intervention, and connect people to care.

As a Certified MHFA instructor, I have had numerous public safety providers ranging in ages from young adults to seniors attend my classes. Their backgrounds have included corrections officers, state and municipal police, firefighters (career and volunteer), EMTs and paramedics as well as probation and parole officers. Participants have shared that the class has helped them increase their knowledge about mental health disorders and they have been better prepared responding to mental health calls. In addition, they have stated it has improved their own mental health and the ability to help co-workers who have responded to tragic emergency calls. Recent first responder class participants stated the following on their evaluations:

- “Excellent course and should be required for all first responders”
- “This course gave me tools for both my professional and personal life”
- “Outstanding course taught very well....gave me a better understanding of what a person with mental illness experiences and how to interact with them more effectively”
- “Helped to de-stigmatize mental illness among our own population and possibly opened a door to us seeking help in the future”

MHFA is designed to be affordable and sustainable and truly helps people do their job better and more effectively.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Dawn M. Roy, LCSW
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