

March 4, 2015

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 Pamela Mautte, and I am the Director of BHcare's, Greater Valley Substance Abuse Action Council (VSAAC). VSAAC is also an active member of the CT Prevention Network (CPN). 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.

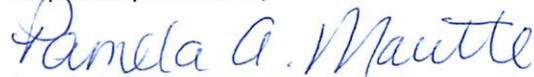
Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an evidence-based 8 hour public education program that is currently being offered throughout CT and the nation. The MHFA for Public Safety course is taught to help law enforcement, first responders, corrections officers and other public safety professionals better understand 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 MHFA instructor, I have had EMS providers ranging in ages from young adults to seniors attend my classes. 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:

- "Mental Health First Aid Training (ALGEE) is a better "tool in the tool box" in dealing with youth in crisis. ALGEE gives you a proven plan to identify, listen to and assist a person in crisis to ensure they get the proper assistance with their crisis."
- "I was very pleased with the mental health first aid training you presented here. As you know I recently retired from the Law Enforcement Community after 32 years as a police officer and 15 of those years as a Detective in the Youth Division. The first thing I got from your training was the ability to stop and listen. It was hard for me to break away from that "police mentality and skepticism". I learned that it is important for the patient to be involved and be a part of the decision-making process. It is extremely important to observe and listen."
- "I am so grateful for this training, it really has helped me understand and change terms I used in the past as well as how I can better respond to calls. I also learned a lot about suicide."

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

Respectfully Submitted,



Pamela A. Mautte  
Director