

Paul D. Acker
Testimony on HB 6887 before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee
February 16, 2017

Good afternoon Senator Larson, Senator Kelly, Representative Scanlon, and distinguished members of the Insurance and Real Estate committee. My name is Paul Acker, Director of Recovery University, the statewide certification program for Recovery Support Specialists at Advocacy Unlimited and a registered voter from Portland, CT. I am submitting testimony today on HB 6887: An act expanding coverage for mental health care services and addiction services.

Advocacy Unlimited, through many years of running Recovery University and conducting a Peer Forum, has spent a lot of time developing peer support in Connecticut. Recovery University has over 1,400 graduates. We have developed an expertise in the area of Peer Support and believe strongly in the power of human connection to create spaces where people can heal. We teach our people a set of values and ethics to help ground them in the essence of mutual support. Our overarching principal is that someone doesn't need to be diagnosed to be supported. That support is at the very essence of our human experience and so we work to normalize and not pathologize extreme human experiences.

HB 6887 as its written appears to give wide latitude to the insurance companies and other players as to what peer support can be. We know at times, as peer support has been implemented by other entities that the peer support ends up becoming a medical extension of existing services. We believe that this prevents peer support from reaching its full potential. We find that when peer support gets medicalized, people stop talking about what's relevant to life and just talk about symptoms. It is the difference between moving forward and maintenance.

I am committed to the expansion of peer support in a way that does not compromise the values of authentic peer support. As it is written, HB 6887 does not protect peer support from co-option. I am asking that a more deliberate process be undertaken to reach the goal of increasing peer support in Connecticut. I am opposing 6887 in hopes we will take the time to do it right for our citizens, instead of slapping haphazardly together a great intent with insufficient vision and values.

Thank you for your time.

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