

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut
Before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee
February 16, 2017**

IN SUPPORT OF

H.B. 6887 AN ACT EXPANDING COVERAGE FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

Good morning Senators Larson and Kelly, Representative Scanlon and members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee, my name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental health conditions. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for quality of life for individuals and families in the community. I am writing to you today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to support *H.B.6887– An Act Expanding Coverage for Mental Health Care Services and Substance Abuse Services*.

Thank you to the committee for hearing testimony on this bill. We support the concept of the bill, as expanding insurance coverage to cover case management services and peer support services would make a distinct difference in individuals' lives and their health outcomes. Peer support is an evidence-based model founded on the principle that individuals who have shared similar experiences can help each other to lead meaningful and productive lives. Having access to medical and clinical professionals when someone is dealing with or working through a mental health or addiction issue, may be very important to individuals. But oftentimes this is not enough to be able to get to the more complex and very individualized situations and past experiences, persons are working through. Sometimes individuals are also more comfortable establishing a relationship with someone who can relate in a non-clinical way, from a peer perspective, instead from an intrinsically power-differentiated position of professional-to-client. Connecticut has two certification programs for two kinds of peer supports. Advocacy Unlimited offers a thorough eighty-hour training for individuals with lived experience in mental health to be certified as Recovery Support Specialists (RSS's). CT Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR) offers a certification program for individuals with lived experience in addiction issues to be certified as Recovery Coaches.

Peer support is an evidence-based practice and has a proven record of success in the community, with studies reinforcing its value and cost-effectiveness in the mental health system. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence indicate that peer support lowers the overall cost of mental health services by reducing re-hospitalization rates and days spent in inpatient services, while increasing the use of outpatient services. Peer programs have been found to be effective with demonstrated real life outcomes including¹ increased life expectancy, improved quality of life, increased self-esteem,

¹ Peers for Progress – Peers Around the World. Retrieved at <http://peersforprogress.org/learn-about-peer-support/science-behind-peer-support/> on 2/15/17

reduced isolation, increased self-efficacy, reduced use of emergency services and others. The importance of peer supports is also recognized on the national level. For example, the highest relevant federal agency, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has endorsed peer support as a vital component of recovery support services and provides information on implementing peer programs, billing for peer-delivered services, and even sample job descriptions. A 2010 SAMHSA / Partners for Recovery report, "Financing Recovery Support Services: Review & Analysis of Funding"² recommends increasing funding for recovery support services (including peer services) throughout the continuum of care, including private sources.

One aspect to keep in mind is the importance of not turning peers into semi-clinical health care workers, for lower pay, but instead making sure that peers are able to keep their distinct lived-experience expertise and status. This can, and oftentimes does happen as part of an interdisciplinary team. However, it needs to be ensured that peers are equal partners in these working relationships and that their role is considered as unique and distinct as it really is.

Case management services can make a real difference for individuals trying to connect to, access and use community resources and supports, especially when dealing with health issues that are more complex or dealing with multiple and intersecting health issues. Case management is meant to assist persons to achieve an optimal quality of life and live successfully in the community. Case management services are intended to be recovery oriented. They can include a wide range of things from supporting people to set up systems to remember appointments, to figuring out how to find the best and most cost-effective grocery options, take classes at the community center and finding people with common interests to create relationships with or try out new skills. I personally had the privilege to work with people in the capacity of a case manager in the public system when I worked for a community mental health agency after I finished my undergraduate education. Being able to support adults and adolescents in figuring out what they wanted, and sometimes needed, to do in their day-to-day life as well as how to pursue longer term goals like going back to school or using their artistic talents to brighten up their day and others' was very rewarding and hopefully helpful in real terms to everyone I worked with.

Both peers support services and case management support people to live quality lives in the community and pursue one's mundane as well as aspirational and creative goals and dreams, by building on one's strengths.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please let me know if I can answer any questions for you.

Respectfully,
Daniela Giordano, MSW
Public Policy Director, NAMI Connecticut

² SAMSHA – Partners for Recovery. Financing Recovery Support Services (2010). Retrieved from www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/partnersforrecovery/docs/RSS_financing_report.pdf on 2/15/17