



State of Connecticut
House Of Representatives

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Senator Larson, Senator Kelly, Representative Scanlon, and Members of the Insurance & Real Estate Committee:

I am here today to ask for your support for HB 6887 - AN ACT EXPANDING COVERAGE FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES. As a social worker and previous chair of Fairfield's local prevention council, I have seen first-hand the impact of addiction and chronic mental illness on individuals and families. We are all seeking solutions that will quite literally save lives.

I join the Catchment Area Council (CAC) of the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board, led by Executive Director Margaret Watt, to advocate for one potential solution: coverage for certified peer support specialists and case management for substance abuse and mental health recovery. The CAC, a group of both providers and consumers, is uniquely positioned to speak to the needs of those who struggle with addiction and mental illness.

Later this morning you will hear compelling testimony from Margaret Watt and her colleagues as to why these services are so critical. I hope you will listen carefully, as they are thoughtful and well supported arguments in favor of this bill. Because Margaret and her team are so effective at making the case, I would like to share information taken directly from the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board's own documents to lay the groundwork for her testimony and define the role of a peer support specialist.

“What is Peer Support? 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. In the field of behavioral health, peers support has been used effectively to help people with severe mental illness (ex. The Clubhouse Model, Intentional Peer Support, Emotions Anonymous), substance use disorders (ex. 12 step programs, Recovery Community Organizations, Telephone Recovery Support), veterans (ex. Vet to Vet), families (ex. Family to Family by the National Alliance on Mental Illness). Around the country, trained, certified peers have been used to provide one to one engagement and motivation, group skills training,

customized care coordination, community support, crisis stabilization and respite, family training and more. Peer specialists have served on hospital inpatient units, in community programs such as Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, as peer bridgers to help transition individuals from inpatient to community settings, as warmlines operators and more.

In Connecticut, Advocacy Unlimited certifies people with lived experience with behavioral health disorders to become Recovery Support Specialists (RSS's)... An RSS provides peer to peer support drawing on personal experience and 80 hours of formal training...Another peer designation in Connecticut is Recovery Coach. Recovery Coaches provide peer support to individuals with a substance use disorder. They are trained by the CT Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR). CCAR is currently working with hospitals in Manchester and New London to use Recovery Coaches to engage people with substance use disorders who present at the emergency room."

The road to recovery is long and arduous. It is not as simple as a short stay in the hospital, or even an extended visit to a detox facility. With an effective team, one which includes a peer support specialist and case manager, individuals battling addiction and chronic mental illness have a better chance at long term recovery and survival.

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