

HB 6887: To require that each health insurance policy delivered, issued for delivery, renewed, amended or continued in this state provide coverage for additional mental health care services and substance abuse services, including, but not limited to, case management services and peer support services.

Good afternoon Senators and Congressmen. My name is Marisa Rambush and I am here representing the Milford division of the CT Strong grant. We are funded through SAMHSA and work closely with DMHAS to support young adults in our three localities: Milford, Middletown, and New London. As a peer support specialist it is never simple to describe my job. Many people have never heard of peer supports and I explain that I am a little bit of everything. I am a social worker, counselor, job coach, driver, substance abuse counselor, educator, and case manager. My job varies depending on the client's needs which can change at any given moment. The young adults I work with come from different economic and cultural backgrounds. They often have a history of trauma and some now have children of their own. I encounter homeless clients who have been abused, neglected, or have grown up in the foster system. An overwhelming majority of them struggle with extreme anxiety and find it very difficult just to leave their home. They lack social skills and isolate themselves. This leads to truancy issues, difficulties forming healthy relationships, and a complete lack of independent living skills necessary to thrive once they have reached adulthood. It is often identified and addressed too little or too late and as a result, we are seeing a "lost generation" of youth cannot function in the world when their education ends. They lack the necessary job skills, basic life management skills and knowledge of resources available to them.

As a peer support, it is my job to help young adults bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood so the transition is smoother and less frightening. I cannot stress enough the importance of this work. As someone in recovery myself, I would have greatly benefited from the services of a peer support. Those who suffer from the disease of addiction can benefit most of all. While clinical services are important, it is essential to every addict's recovery that they have the

support of someone who has lived experience and can fully understand the struggles they face. This ability to relate is crucial especially to those who resist twelve step groups or formal therapy. It offers one-on-one access to someone which is more comfortable to those with social anxiety.

This bill is just the beginning of keeping CT at the forefront of mental health and addiction services in this country. As the role of a peer support continues to evolve, it should be our goal to increase access to peer support services, especially to those just coming out of rehabilitation centers, hospitals, and outpatient programs. Too often they are left to fend for themselves and go back to the negative behaviors they were being treated for.

The critical nature of this bill can also help with another glaring issue surrounding peer support services. If insurance companies become responsible for covering peer support services, there will be increased regulation of them. At the moment, there is not a defined job description for peer supports or a common salary expectation. Each agency defines the job separately and sets its own pay rate. The difficult and emotional nature of this job is not something that everyone can handle. Too often, people go into this field without the necessary self-control or strength in their own recovery to be truly able to help others without causing unnecessary damage. With more regulation, there can be more screening tools put in place to determine the effectiveness of a potential peer support candidate. It will give the field more respect and encourage more candidates to seek more education. It will also help reduce costs of treatment by a clinician and lower rates of people seeking social service assistance by encouraging them to become healthier, more productive members of society. I believe that insurance coverage legitimizes the work of a peer support and I strongly encourage you to vote in favor of HB6887. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.