

**Testimony before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee**

**February 16, 2017**

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

Latosha Taylor, Middletown

Good Afternoon Respective Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee,

Thank you for holding the public hearing on H.B. 6887 AN ACT EXPANDING COVERAGE FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES.

My name is Latosha Taylor and I reside in Middletown with my son and daughter.

I've had many life altering experiences that have colored how I perceive the world and affected how I have interacted within it. I've had many challenges to overcome to continue to stay in this world and thrive. Many of these challenges were labeled as Mental Illnesses which for the last 25yrs has had me in the loop hole of seeking services from our current Psychiatric system. A system that never seemed to help, but bound me more with the perception that there was something fundamentally flawed within me.

It wasn't until 2010 that through yet another experience that I found a greater purpose within myself that ultimately connected me with other peers within my state and all over the U.S. that had similar experiences. This was the beginning of the road to true recovery for me. I found meaning and value from my experiences that empowered me to help build the only peer run nonprofit within my home state of Arkansas. I became actively involved in my home state to be a voice for others that may not know that they had one or didn't know how to use it to describe their own experience.

Coming from a Southern Conservative state, we had an uphill battle in trying to get valued peer run services within our state. A lot of days I ended up feeling like one of the only voices in this great fight. One of the only things that continuously gave me inspiration and hope was the support from my peers in other states. I held onto the vision that I saw play out in my fellow peer's organizations and lives. I wanted that so bad in my own state and life. However, as I was working hard to bring these services in my own state, life continued to happen. In January 2016, I ended up making the painful decision to leave the battle to my fellow peers in Arkansas and take a leap of faith and move to Connecticut where there was an already a well-established peer movement that I could immerse myself in to continue to have the support I needed in my own recovery. I moved to this state because Connecticut has one of the leading peer run organizations in the United States, Advocacy Unlimited.

In moving here, I was welcomed with open arms and became employed with Advocacy Unlimited. It has added so much more value in my life to be able to continue to do this amazing work with and for my other peers.

With all that being said, I want to take the stance of opposing H.B. 6887 as it is. As I reflected on my own experience with peer support, I found the experience to be in its most authentic form, one human connecting with one another through their shared lived experience. I'm afraid that with the services that are already provided through peer support in its current form which is based on building a relationship

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and mutuality that if we medicalize this service through billing through insurance that it will take away from the true essence of what peer support really means. This would become a business transaction and will take away from the core of what peer support is about and that's human connection.

I give credit and value for the idea of peer support becoming a reimbursable service because it brings to light that this practice is a credible option and could add to our peer support workforce. I however, do not believe that it should be a discussion brought through a bill proposed through legislation. I would ask that peer support be removed from the current legislation.

I would like to thank you for your time in reading my written testimony and concerns. I am open to any questions and can be available to offer further information.

[ltaylor@advocacyunlimited.org](mailto:ltaylor@advocacyunlimited.org)