

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No 126: An Act Concerning Community Health Workers

Testimony Submitted by: Grace Damio on behalf of the Hispanic Health Council

Public Health Committee Hearing, February 10, 2017

Good afternoon Co-Chairs Gerratana, Somers and Steinberg, and Committee members. My name is Grace Damio, and I am here to testify in Support of Senate Bill No 126: An Act Concerning Community Health Workers.

I support this bill because community health worker services are a critically needed resource, with a major body of evidence supporting their contribution toward improving health outcomes and saving health care dollars; and yet, these vital services lack the recognition, infrastructure and sustained funding needed for achievement of their full impact.

Senate Bill 126 seeks full recognition, integration, and sustainability of community health worker services in Connecticut. The bill proposes:

- codifying the definition, roles and responsibilities of Community Health Workers, established by the Community Health Worker Advisory Committee of the State Innovation Model (or SIM),
- and seeks establishment of a Community Health Worker Integration Council to make recommendations on a sustainable CHW program in CT.

I am testifying on behalf of the Hispanic Health Council, a statewide community-based organization. We have decades of experience delivering and evaluating community health worker services. We have conducted randomized controlled trials with a partner from Yale, and used the results to inform development of community health worker policy.

Here's an example of how this works:

Community health workers based at the Hispanic Health Council worked with low-income patients of a Hartford Hospital diabetes clinic.

The patients experienced multiple barriers to successful diabetes management, including low health literacy, co-morbidities, depression and stress, inadequate social support, food insecurity, and other social determinants of health.

Peer counselors conducted home visits to:

- provide health and nutrition education,
- encourage healthy food selection and physical activity onsite in supermarkets and local parks; and
- facilitate health and mental health appointments, and linkages to services needed to address social determinants of health, and related advocacy.

Community health workers were integrated into the clinical health care team that served the patients, through weekly case review meetings and telephone contact.

They brought to the clinical setting concerns identified in participants' homes. For example, one patient was taking 22 medications; a chart review concluded that only 11 were needed.

At the end of the day, participants with a community health worker had an average HbA1c reduction of 1 full point, compared to .4 in the control group; this difference sustained itself for six months post-intervention.

This is the kind of stellar outcome that community health workers can help to achieve. Key to this success is the community-based roles that facilitate addressing the social determinants of health that impact the ability of patients to manage their health, and adhere to health care guidance.

What's needed is full recognition, integration, and sustainability of community health worker services in Connecticut.

I thank you in advance for your support of Senate Bill 126.