

Senate Bill 126 - An Act Concerning Community Health Workers

Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers, Representative Steinberg, and members of the Public Health Committee. I am pleased to submit this testimony as a current employee of Northwestern Area Health Education Center (AHEC), Inc., and a resident of Newtown. I endorse Senate Bill 126, which would define the roles and responsibilities of Community Health Workers (CHWs) to provide recognition for this important, emerging workforce in CT.

Community Health Workers are important in Connecticut because they can provide culturally and linguistically competent services to community members who do not speak English, or are from other countries and are unfamiliar with the health systems here. This is especially important because CHWs are generally from the communities they serve and can be trusted. The proposed definition of CHWs for CT by the SIM Advisory Committee is:

“A Community Health Worker (CHW) is a front line public health worker who is a trusted member of, and/or has a unique understanding of the experience, language, culture, and socioeconomic needs of the community served. A CHW serves as a liaison/intermediary between individuals, communities and health and social services to facilitate access to care, improve the quality and cultural responsiveness of service delivery, and address social determinants of health.

CHWs build individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of culturally appropriate services such as: outreach and engagement; education, coaching, and informal counseling; social support; advocacy; care coordination; basic screenings and assessments; and research and evaluation.”

Having worked closely with CHWs, this truly describes what they do. I feel it’s important for Connecticut to recognize us as a workforce. This definition is the first step in order to do so.

CHWs can provide linkages to resources to assist clients in their daily lives. For example, I have been able to help a client get help from abuse by linking them to the domestic violence hot-line, and then follow up with them to be sure that they are getting the help that they

need. CHWs also help people to relieve some of the stress in their daily lives by addressing the social determinants of health. They may help a family that is being evicted, and get some place for them to stay, or they may be able to help them to understand healthy food options for their diabetes, and where to get them. They can also connect them to resources to and help by coaching them for better health by exercising and committing to lifestyle changes and following up with them.

CHWs also provide clients by helping them to be advocates for their environment, such as improving air quality by fighting against pollutants such as coal plants, and getting more police presence to prevent violence and promote safety. They teach them how to work in the community so that they can get organized to have a stronger voice on these types of issues

Senate Bill 126 will help to provide a provide a definition for CHWs, and a scope of work that includes the roles, skills and qualities as recommended from the SIM CHW Advisory Committee, and, finally, help to define a credentialing process for CHWs so that they can be paid in a sustainable way in the future.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity for this written testimony. If I can be of further service, I can be contacted below.

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