

**Testimony Before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee
March 5, 2019**

In support of:

HB 7125—An Act Concerning Parity for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Benefits, Non-Quantitative Treatment Limitations, Drugs Prescribed for the Treatment of Substance Abuse Disorders, and Substance Abuse Services.

HB 5270—An Act Concerning Peer Support Specialists and Requiring Health Insurance Coverage For Outpatient Peer Support Services Provided for by Certified Peer Support Specialists.

Good afternoon Senator Lesser, Representative Scanlon, and members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee.

My name is Thomas Burr, from Glastonbury, CT. I am the Community and Affiliate Relations Manager, and part of the Public Policy Staff at the Connecticut Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I am also the parent of an adult child who is in recovery from bipolar disorder, after 8 years' worth of repeated psychosis, suicide attempts, hospitalizations, incarcerations, and homelessness. Currently he is living on his own; he is in recovery, working full time, and doing very well; in fact, he has been clean and sober and working for the past 11 straight years! NOTE: Some of the best care he received during his illness occurred right here in Hartford, at the Capital Regions Mental Health Center.

My colleague, Susan Kelley, our Director of Advocacy and Policy at NAMI Connecticut will or has already given her testimony with a lot of supporting documentation and reasons why these 2 bills are worthy of your support. I will instead add some personal perspective to both.

Regarding Mental Health Parity, I was AMAZED when my son finally was no longer able to be on what I considered to be my wonderful health insurance plan as provided by my Fortune 50 employer at the time. When he went onto Medicaid, and had to be hospitalized, I was beyond apprehensive, and feared the worst. HOWEVER, IT WAS SIMPLY THE BEST CARE HE EVER GOT! What private insurance promises, the state system actually delivers. As someone who still volunteers as a NAMI Family & Caregiver Support Group Facilitator, I hear this regularly from other parents and caregivers.

I regards to PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS, as someone who has been in this world of mental health for the past 20 years, I can tell you that these individuals provide something that most clinical staff cannot: real world experience and PERSPECTIVE. One of the truly devastating effects of having a mental health condition is the inability to see your way out of the darkness and into recovery. I saw this play out with my son, who was extremely despondent and thinking his life was over; and I hear this on a regular basis from others. Having a PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST available, who has made their way through the process of recovery is simply just a critical requirement for someone battling these types of health issues.

On a related note, please also be aware that people with mental health challenges who cannot access proper care in their communities will often wind up using expensive crisis-based services, such as the Emergency Room, inpatient psychiatric hospitals; or worse, ending up in our jails and/or prisons. This can add over a \$1,000 PER person PER day to the state's expenses*.

IN SUMMARY: I support both Mental Health Parity, and Peer Support Services, as outlined in these 2 bills.

Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective, and People Recover. My son is just one of countless examples of people who have recovered, and who are now leading meaningful lives, working, and paying taxes!

Thank you. I will now gladly answer any questions you have.

Respectfully submitted,

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* Typical per diem costs for ER (\$2,152), inpatient psychiatric (\$1,157), or hospitalization (\$1,089) costs; data courtesy of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project.