



Kimberlee Pita
Board Chair

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW
President & CEO

Testimony in support of
H.B. No. 5270: AN ACT CONCERNING PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS AND
REQUIRING HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR OUTPATIENT PEER SUPPORT SERVICES
PROVIDED BY CERTIFIED PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS.

Insurance and Real Estate Committee, Public Hearing, March 5, 2019

Representative Scanlon, Senator Lesser, Senator Kelly, Representative Pavalock-DAmato, and Distinguished Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee:

My name is Suzi Craig and I am the Senior Director of Policy at Mental Health Connecticut (MHC). MHC provides community-based services across Connecticut, and we have offices in six areas – Stamford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, Torrington, Danbury, and West Hartford – providing services that support the four pillars of recovery: home, health, purpose, and community. I am also the head of the CT Parity Coalition (www.ctparitycoalition.org), a state-wide group of 25 organizations, associations, and individuals who are rallying support for equitable health care coverage.

MHC supports HB 5270 AN ACT CONCERNING PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS AND REQUIRING HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR OUTPATIENT PEER SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED BY CERTIFIED PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS.

A peer support worker is someone with the lived experience of recovery from a mental health condition, substance use disorder, or both. They provide support to others experiencing similar challenges. The role of a peer support specialist complements the roles of therapists, case managers, and other members of a treatment team. Data on peer support specialists shows that their work helps to improve quality of care and reduce health care costs by providing alternatives to hospitalization, reducing the length of hospital stay, and preventing rehospitalizations.

MHC employs peer workers with great success. We believe in this work and we see its benefits every day in our program participants' ability to reach their recovery goals. We also are passionate about supporting the career paths of those in peer support. A peer worker's personal experience, and their knowledge of what it's like to thrive with a mental health and/or substance use disorder, has been proven invaluable to the success of their peers during all phases of the recovery journey.





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H.B. 5270 would define peer support services, outline the services that can be provided, and identify what private insurance would cover. Currently, peer support services provided by Recovery Support Specialists or Recovery Coaches are reimbursed by Medicaid. But what about individuals outside the DMHAS system—the majority of CT state residents—who cannot access peer support services?

On the other side of this story, there is an estimated 950 certified Recovery Support Specialists in Connecticut who are unable to find employment in their field. So, we have thousands of individuals who could benefit from having a peer support worker as a part of their health care team and plenty of workers who can fill this role, yet no way to make this happen.

Thanks to the amazing efforts of Advocacy Unlimited and the CT Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR) to train peer support workers, Connecticut provides peers with the training, guidance, and support they need. Peer support is not new, but there are now over 30 studies that prove its positive effects. Numerous other states in the U.S. deploy peers in a variety of situations with great results.

Mental Health Connecticut is the New England testing site for Mental Health America's National Certified Peer Specialist certification. A major purpose of the certification is to meet the needs of private health insurers and private practitioners. Expansion of peer support into the private sector will open up new career paths and opportunities, which have been previously unexplored, for thousands of peers.

Private insurance coverage for peer support is an investment in decreasing health care costs, improving the long-term health of our CT friends and neighbors, and expanding a much-needed workforce in our health care teams.

Thank you for your time and for your service,

Suzi Craig
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