

Testimony in support of:

House Bill 5270 An Act Concerning Peer Support Specialists And Requiring Health Insurance Coverage For Outpatient Peer Support Services Provided By Certified Peer Support Specialists

Submitted by:

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Dear Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee,

My name is Lisbeth Gannon, from Naugatuck CT and I would like to speak in support of House Bill 5270.

I have both personal and professional experience related to the topic of peer support. My recovery from bipolar has started and stopped over and over many times since my diagnosis in 1999. I have been hospitalized several times in between working and going to school. Each time I stood back up and tried in some way to continue on my life's journey. Eventually with a lot of work I pushed myself to obtaining my masters degree and becoming a licensed professional counselor. I worked in the field for a few years before my the symptoms of my mental health disorder became too much and I needed to file for disability.

That was the scariest day of my life. I didn't know if I would ever work again. I didn't know if recovering again would be possible the time. At 35 years old I moved back into my parents basement and spent hours doing nothing but watching television and surfing the internet. Eventually I found an add for something called a Recovery Support Specialist at Continuum of Care. It would be a way to give back and contribute some of my knowledge and lived experience to help other people. I was so grateful to find that program because when I applied and was accepted to their internship program it felt like maybe life could continue. There was a way to move forward.

Since that day I have been helping others like myself face difficult nights by working on the warm line. I talk to others about my experiences of finding a therapist, using my coping skills and summoning the inner strength and wisdom that guides us all to find a circle of support. Many people thank me after our calls and say that after hearing my story they feel less alone.

One person said that they would put down the drink that would have ended years of sobriety, others were able to make their way through panic attacks. In some cases crises were averted because someone was there with them to witness their struggle and to relate to what they were going through.

Living with a mental health condition takes courage and strength every single day. For twenty years I struggled taking social risks to find social supports and taking small jobs that I hoped

and prayed would lead to something more. I had to figure out how to cope with my symptoms between therapists and medication changes alone.

Although I have supportive people in my life none of them really knows what it is like to face the challenges that I am up against every day. I believe that if I had had the peer support to help me along the way I may not have fallen so many times. Having the hope to stand back up again is worth everything.

I urge you to support House Bill 5270 so that people in our state can have the support they need to prevent crises and relapses as well as to cope with everyday struggles. I believe this will save the state money and improve our mental health system. Thank you for your support.

Yours respectfully,  
Lisbeth Gannon