

Testimony in support of:

House Bill 5270: An Act Concerning Peer Support Specialists and Requiring Health Insurance Coverage for Outpatient Peer Support Services by Certified Peer Support Specialists

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Submitted by

Matt Reilly

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Dear members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee,

My name is Matt Reilly, I was born in Greenwich, grew up in Darien, and I'm now back living at a mental-health group home in Greenwich, Connecticut. I've been in various kinds of treatment for as long as I can remember – the first time I was sent to a mental health professional, I was eight years old, I am 29 now.

I am in favor of passing House Bill 5270, an act concerning Peer Support Specialist and requiring health insurance coverage for outpatient peer support services provided by peer support specialists. As someone who is currently benefiting from Peer Support interventions provided by a Certified Peer Support Specialist, I urge you to pass this bill, not just for my sake, but for the sake of the many other Connecticut Residents who have experienced mental health problems and could benefit from peer support themselves. Requiring health insurance to cover the services provided by qualified peers, will increase access to relevant services.

seen by and sent to regular talk therapists and psychiatrists; I've spent time in locked wards at psychiatric hospitals; I've taken a variety of medications; I have always been active in working with the mental health practitioners I've had access to.

Now, I am a client of Pathways, in Greenwich, living in their transitional housing program, a place I landed after a manic episode. The group home I live in is highly structured due to insurance requirements and is staffed 24 hours a day. There are many groups and

interventions that I have access to. I have a very competent and engaging social worker and a good local psychiatrist. Insurance covers all of this without question.

Yet, until recently, at times, I still did not feel connected to my recovery. These treatments and groups and meetings with professionals felt like things that were happening to me, rather than choices I was making in my life to become a healthy, independent adult. This is not a complaint or a negative reflection of anyone I work with. This is my way of saying that sometimes traditional care is not enough to feel connected.

Being in treatment off and on for so long has been hard. I recognize that I have a tendency to run into trouble I can't get myself out of sometimes and that I need help figuring out what sustainable recovery looks like for me. I've had periods of doing well and living independently. In my mid-20's it seemed like I had things figured out until I drove my car into a telephone pole and wrecked it. That car wreck and subsequent 18-month long hospitalization sent me back into needing more comprehensive treatment – living in my current group home. Pathways has a Peer Support Specialist that I've been able to begin working with in the past few months. I've been able to connect with her differently than I have been able to connect with other staff. She is not my only resource, but she is one I rely on and trust with things I would not share with other staff. Working with her in individual sessions as well as in peer support groups, she has helped me gain perspective, refocus my goals, and reorient my disposition which had previously been bleak. When she asks me to challenge my thinking patterns or consider approaching things differently, I enjoy improvising and collaborating with her for the express and explicit reason that she does understand in an empathetic and non-clinical way, in addition to all the other reasons. When I was asked to accompany her to advocate for this bill I literally jumped at the chance.

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Reilly