

Testimony before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee March 5, 2019
HB 5270: An Act Concerning Peer Support Specialists and Requiring Health Insurance Coverage for Outpatient Peer Support Services Provided By Certified Peer Support Specialists.

My name is David Woodworth and I am a registered voter in Winsted.

I submit this testimony for the record in strong support of requiring health insurance coverage for outpatient peer support services provided by certified peer support specialists.

I was certified as a Recovery Support Specialist in 2012 by Advocacy Unlimited. I worked professionally at Prime Time Club House as a Rehabilitation Specialist, where I was previously a member. While employed by Prime Time, I completed the 2-day Legislative Advocacy training provided by Keep the Promise (KTP). In 2013, I was given the Advocacy Leadership Award, and in 2018 I won the Robert Davidson Award for Most Memorable Testimony, both from the KTP Coalition.

I advocate for peer support for 2 simple reasons: it helps other individuals and it helps my own personal recovery.

Before attaining stable recovery through Peer Support, I was actively abusing drugs and alcohol on a daily basis. I was unable to maintain steady employment, and with a Bachelor's Degree, I was underemployed as a Part-time clerk at a local grocery store. My family was very concerned about my mental health, and I lacked strong connections with friends who truly cared. Despite receiving various forms of clinical mental health care since 1999, it took until 2011 to get the complementary help I truly needed from comprehensive Peer Support. It was through building a strong network of Peer Support over the years to get to where I am today.

In recovery, I have had the opportunity to be of service to individuals struggling with their own mental health and substance abuse challenges. From the very small and simple gestures of reaching out with phone calls or text messages, to providing car rides to 12-step meetings and going out for coffee and meals to just share a human connection offering hope. Liking and commenting on Facebook posts in a positive way even brings small doses of encouragement. I have helped close friends and family members progress from numerous suicide attempts and heroin overdoses to getting jobs, going back to school, getting married (and

divorced), having children, relapsing/regressing, and still having the courage to admit their faults, get back on their feet, and continue their journey of recovery.

As a client of Western Connecticut Mental Health Network's Torrington Office of DMHAS, I was blessed with the opportunity to have a Certified Recovery Support Specialist (RSS), who is also a team-member of the Community Support Program. My RSS had a special ability to reach me a personal level, not only because he lived through some of the same experiences that I was going through, but also because he spoke authentically from his lived recovery without fear of breaking professional boundaries or losing my trust and respect. Usually my RSS would pick me up at home in Winsted, and we would go to the Twin Colony diner in Torrington for coffee or lunch. His hopeful attitude gave me hope, and I was able to open up about my struggles and fears to someone else that was open-minded and willing to take the time to listen without judgment. I needed this type of support from a fellow peer in recovery because I knew he understood where I was at, and he very compassionately gave me the space and time to heal and grow in my ability to help me help myself. I am eternally grateful to have had my energy reciprocated, as I feel like I may have been as helpful to my RSS as he was to me.

He also intimated an experience to me he had with another one of his clients. A gentleman, approximately my own age, and living with his parents, had extreme difficulties with his decision-making abilities, leaving the house, and going to public places, in general. After working together with my RSS for a long time, he was able, on his own for the very first time, to walk down the frozen food aisle and pick out his own ice cream, a pint of Ben + Jerry's Chocolate Fudge Brownie. This milestone was so important to his client that my RSS personally contacted the Burlington, Vermont-based ice cream maker to make sure that particular flavor variety would always be in stock at that particular grocery store. Now, what other staff of any other state agency do you know of that would have the willingness to go the extra mile like this?

In conclusion, I have now been gratefully clean and sober for over 7 years. I am back in school pursuing an Associate's Degree in Human Services at Northwestern Connecticut Community College. I am an actively involved citizen of my community. I am happily employed as a Part-time Personal Care Assistant with Companions + Homemakers. I still volunteer at Prime Time Club House on a

weekly basis. I now have healthy, mutually supportive relationships with my family and peers. I hereby humbly request that outpatient peer support services provided by certified peer support specialists be covered by health insurance.

Peer support is an evidence-based mental health practice. The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recognizes that peer support is one of ten components of recovery. Research shows that experiences of peer support specialists can be an important part of effective treatment for mental health and substance abuse conditions. For more information, please look up “What are Peer Recovery Support Services?” or simply search for “peer support” on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website here:

<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/What-Are-Peer-Recovery-Support-Services-/sma09-4454>