

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-859

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS.

Vote Date: 3/29/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/25/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To certify community health workers. A community health worker (CHW) is a public health professional who facilitates access between communities and the social service and healthcare fields. SB 859 requires and authorizes the Department of Public Health (DPH) to establish and implement a certification program for community health workers. The bill does not indicate education level, training, or fee requirements for certification.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Victoria Veltri, Executive Director, Office of Health Strategy (OHS):

The Office is very supportive of CHW certification. CHWs improve the life and health of communities they serve because they have a unique understanding and knowledge of their social determinants. Such knowledge gives them the skills to facilitate access to the most appropriate healthcare for individual needs.

Headed by OHS, in 2018 the State Innovation Model Community Health Worker Advisory Committee (CHW Committee) reported the significant benefits of developing standardized training and credentialing of CHWs, as well as 18 recommendations for facilitating such a program. Although not included in this bill, OHS, in collaboration with DPH and key stakeholders, is currently developing alternative language for Public Health Committee's consideration. The language pertains to the development of the certification program, and offers detailed recommendations so that DPH may more easily facilitate its implementation.

Raul Pino, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH):

DPH supports the certification of CHWs but notes that the bill is missing pertinent language. The CHW Committee reported out many recommended provisions that the bill does not contain. The provisions include requirements for certification and recertification, the establishment of a CHW registry, a sufficient training program curriculum, as well as certification fees and grounds for revoking certification. The Committee also examined the fiscal implications for establishing and implementing a statewide program and acknowledged that DPH would require additional resources in order to successfully fulfil their role. The Department remains supportive of CHW certification, but first requires the aforementioned provisions to be included in the bill. DPH is happy to work with the CHW Committee to assist with language drafting.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA):

CHA supports the bill and states that community health workers play an essential role in the healthcare field. The work of CHWs greatly reduces racial, ethnic, gender and socioeconomic health disparities. CHA believes establishing a certification program is vital to ensure competency in such a significant role.

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut:

The Foundation recognizes the beneficial work of community health workers and fully supports the bill. In addition to the economic value they provide, CHWs have consistently demonstrated the importance of their role by improving access to healthcare. The CHW Committee comprised of DPH, community health workers and their employers, physicians and other stakeholders, has thoroughly considered this issue and reported key recommendations for CHW certification. Connecticut must move forward with this legislation which recognizes and sustains the work of CHWs.

Mary Jane Williams, Chair, Government Relations Committee, Connecticut Nurses Association (CNA):

The Association supports the bill. Community health workers were first implemented in 1995 when the Connecticut Area Health Education Center had a goal of improving access to basic healthcare for communities. Important to note is that CHWs are from the communities they serve and therefore understand their culture, their needs, and their barriers. They are resourceful and able to facilitate access between their community and the healthcare system. Establishing a certification program will improve access to healthcare and support workforce development. The Association offers their assistance with developing a certification program.

Karen Siegel, Connecticut Voices for Children:

Connecticut Voices for Children strongly supports the bill because CHWs play a significant role in closing the gap between individual life circumstances and access to healthcare. There are currently ten states that either certify or issue training certifications for CHWs. Establishing a program and implementing the certification of CHWs in Connecticut is critical.

The State is segregated by race and income, both of which dramatically affect an individual's health. Such disparities are the result of historical oppression and systemic racism where the negative effects have been demonstrated through educational disparities, lower incomes, and lack of health insurance coverage. Individuals may not be able to pay for a prescription, purchase healthy food, drive to a social service or healthcare agency, or speak English.

A CHW comes from the community they serve and are aware of individual obstacles. As such, they are able to facilitate communication and access by acting as a liaison between individuals and the social service and healthcare systems. They connect people to clinics, pharmacies, housing assistance, fuel assistance, in addition to offering training at home such as managing asthma and even breastfeeding. This legislation will expand the CHW workforce and greatly improve access to healthcare for those in need.

Roberta Friedman, Chair, Advocacy Committee, Connecticut Public Health Association (CPHA):

CPHA supports the bill because it will improve health outcomes for Connecticut residents as well as economize the healthcare system. Recognizing the importance of CHWs will lead to greater sustainability for the role. The Association urges the Public Health Committee to vote favorably on the bill.

Deb Polun, Senior Director, Policy and Outreach, Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHCACT):

The Association supports the bill because CHWs are essential to individual-centered care. Community health workers come from communities they serve and are therefore uniquely qualified to assist individuals because they understand their culture, language, and needs. In fact, while the title may be different, the role of CHWs has been utilized for decades by healthcare centers. They may at times be referred to as patient navigators, care coordinators, or access to care specialists. This profession is vital to reducing healthcare barriers because they are able to arrange doctor appointments, provide transportation and language translation, offer coaching and enroll individuals in healthcare insurance. Community health workers are generally funded by grants. If a grant ends, so do the services of the CHW. This legislation will create a sustainable model of funding for the role so that much needed community assistance does not end.

Milagrosa Seguinot, Community Health Worker:

Ms. Seguinot supports the bill and presents examples of the many ways she has provided service in the Bridgeport community. Parts of her duties include finding primary care providers (PCP) for people in need. Most of the people are screened at food pantries for cholesterol, diabetes, blood pressure, and many other ailments. If the results show that they require assistance with management, Ms. Seguinot assists them in finding a primary provider. To do so, she must first identify the reason each individual does not have a PCP or health insurance, and identify why they are not able to manage their own health. She finds that many of them have never had a PCP and are relieved to know they can apply for health insurance. Without Ms. Seguinot, these people would still be struggling. She, and all CHWs, are the link between healthy and unhealthy lives.

Additional sources of support include:

Meredith Ferraro, Executive Director, Southeastern Area Health Education Centers (AHEC)
Fernando Morales, Assistant Director, Southeastern AHEC
Maggie Litwin, Program Coordinator, Southeastern AHEC
Deborah Monahan, Executive Director, Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA)
Lee Carezza, Assistant Director for Community Action, TVCCA
Tekisha Dwan Everette, Executive Director, Health Equity Solutions
Millie Landock, Health Equity Solutions
Edith Karsky, Executive Director, Connecticut Association for Community Action
Stuart Rosenberg, President, Johnson Memorial Medical Center
Patricia Baker, President and CEO, Connecticut Health Foundation
Rick Brush, CEO, Wellville
Bruce Gould, MD, Associate Dean for Primary Care, UConn School of Medicine
Marcia DuFore, North Central Regional Mental Health Board
Kei Shao Tikkanen
Farah Rahman
Alan Aleia
Lauren Rosato
Grace Damio
Elaine O'Keefe
Calvin Gordon
Samuel Bowens III
Tanisha Valladares
Stephen Feathers
Stephen Smith
Romano Myers
Bianca Noronas
Paul Casanova
Daniel Ghajar
Jerry Veneruso
Barbara Ligon
Joyce Boone
Abigail Torres
Jackie Robertson
Supriyo Chatterjee
Saira Lopez
Valen Grandelski

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None provided.

Reported by: Valentina Mehmeti

Date: 4/8/2019