

Testimony before the Insurance Committee

February 27, 2020

H.B. No. 5248 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR PEER SUPPORT SERVICES IN THE STATE.

Jeffrey Santo, RSS

Senator Lesser, Rep. Scanlon, and members of the Insurance Committee,

My name is Jeffrey Santo, and I am a registered voter in the city of Norwalk. I am here to testify regarding H.B. 5248 An Act Establishing A Task Force To Study Health Insurance Coverage For Peer Support Services In The State. Unfortunately, I can not be there in person to deliver this testimony to you, but my absence should not undermine how important this issue is to me.

I am a state-certified Recovery Support Specialist and, as such qualified to work alongside treatment teams for mental health care, people living with addiction, or a co-occurrence of the two. Peer Recovery Coaches, as well as Recovery Support Specialists, are held to the same professional and ethical standards other providers are to adhere. I want to support the creation of this task force in any way I can and feel that it is a step in the right direction. My one disappointment is that this was not done before bills were put forward in the past. One example of this was HB 5270: An Act Concerning Peer Support Specialists and Requiring Health Insurance Coverage for Outpatient Peer Support Services Provided By Certified Peer Support Specialists. This bill was raised in the 2019 legislative session, and many certified peers, including myself, came to testify before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee on March 5, 2019.

We have known for a long time about the benefit that Peers in recovery can provide, as far back as 1935 when Bill Wilson talked to another alcoholic, Bob Smith, about the nature of alcoholism and a possible solution. This was when Alcoholics Anonymous, more commonly known as AA, was founded. An article written by Brian Prioleau in 2014 titled *“Peer Support Recovery Is the Future of Behavioral Health”* remains posted on the SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) website. In this article, he says,

“Peer support specialists are becoming more vital to the field. Mr. Cameron believes peer supporters fill an important role in the behavioral health workforce. “The real value a peer supporter has is that they are uniquely qualified to engage people with mental health issues.”

In a 2017 presentation, SAMHSA answered the question, What Does A Peer Support Worker Do?

“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. They provide non-clinical, strengths-based support and are “experientially credentialed” by their own recovery journey (Davidson, et al., 1999). Peer support workers may be referred to by different names depending upon the setting in which they practice. Common titles include: peer specialists, peer recovery coaches, peer advocates, and peer recovery support specialists.”

As a Recovery Support Specialist, I am a mental health professional. I am required to adhere to HIPAA guidelines which protect the privacy of any client who works with me. I am required to take additional classes and continue my training just as other professionals in the mental health and addiction services field. To keep my certification in good standing, I must earn 60 continuing education credits every three years. If SAMHSA is right, and many peers believe they are, we are the future of mental health, not only in the United States but around the world. This task force is necessary to prepare for that future and to make sure the residents of Connecticut have access to the level of care and services they will need now and many years to come.

Thank you for reading to my testimony this today and providing this forum for all of our voices to be heard.