

Insurance and Real Estate Committee HOUSE FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5248

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY HEALTH INSURANCE

Title: COVERAGE FOR PEER SUPPORT SERVICES IN THIS STATE.

Vote Date: 3/10/2020

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/27/2020

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Insurance and Real Estate Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill will establish a task force to study health insurance coverage for peer support services in this state.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Paul Acker, Senior Policy Advisor, Advocacy Unlimited supports the passage of HB-5248. We ask that two of the ten seats on the task force be for persons with direct lived experience providing peer support in mental health and/or addiction services and that two additional seats be offered to Advocacy Unlimited and CCAR (Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery) who train people to provide professional peer support. Without the vast expertise and knowledge of people directly involved in peer support, any task force will fail to capture the core essence of the profession. As many say in our movement, "Nothing about us without us." Peer support professionals must be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of such a huge shift in the system, as this directly affects their craft and the people who choose to utilize their support.

Marcia DuFore, Executive Director, Amplify, Inc this is a topic of great concern to me and one that our members identify as a top priority in all our needs assessments. But the opiate epidemic has reached such proportions of late, that is hard for any of us to view the problem

from a distance – a problem that does not touch someone we hold dear. That happened for me several years ago. She explained in detail the hardship of a close family. People lose out on recovery every day because they lack support at critical junctures for treating this illness and moving on toward long term sustained recovery. We lose out because some of these people die and those who love them suffer immensely. We lose out because of the economic cost of repeated crisis care and the number of people who don't find recovery and become productive citizens. We have a crisis. Please move this bill forward and help us ensure that insurance coverage for mental health and addiction includes critically needed peer support services.

Kathy Flaherty, Esq., Executive Director, CT Legal Rights Project, Inc. support HB 5248 and establish a task force to study health insurance coverage for peer support services in this state. Peer-delivered services promote recovery. I would suggest that the task force also examine coverage for peer support services under Medicaid. It is very important that the Task Force include people from the various organizations who have been involved in training peer providers of support services, including recovery support specialists and recovery coaches, so my suggestion would be that the committee consider amending the bill to name specific organizations to be included at the table.

Patricia Rehmer, Senior Vice President, Behavioral Health Network, Hartford Healthcare We would encourage the committee to expand the charge of the group to look at coverage under Medicaid and to ensure that peer support specialists are included in this conversation. Should this bill move forward, we would welcome the opportunity to participate. According to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), peer support workers are people who have been successful in the recovery process who help others experiencing similar situations. Through shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment, peer support workers help people become and stay engaged in the recovery process and reduce the likelihood of relapse. Peer support services can effectively extend the reach of treatment beyond the clinical setting into the everyday environment of those seeking a successful, sustained recovery process. Peer support is an evidence-based practice and is cost effective. HHC uses peer support specialists for a variety of purposes, including long term follow up after discharge. Our peer support specialists must complete a rigorous 80-hour course and pass a certification exam. Currently we are not reimbursed for these services either under Medicaid or commercial insurance in Connecticut. While these services should be available to more patients, we are concerned that if peer support specialist services are covered by Medicaid or private insurance, they will be limited to patients who meet their health plan's medical necessity standards. Right now, providers who offer this service may do so in cases where Medicaid or insurance is unlikely to reimburse. This topic certainly merits further study and discussion and we agree with the task force.

Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, CT Community Nonprofit Alliance supports H.B. 5248, which would establish a task force to study health insurance coverage for peer support services in Connecticut. Peer Support services are recovery-focused services provided by specialists who have experience recovering from mental health or substance abuse conditions. They are a crucial part of behavioral health treatment, and a growing body of evidence and experience shows that peer support services are effective at treating mental health conditions and helping people recover from addiction. Connecticut does not require commercial insurance companies cover peer support services, even though

they have been proven effective to help people recover from mental health and substance abuse conditions. Connecticut also does now allow peer support services to be billed through Medicaid, even though many other states do. While this important service should be available to all Connecticut's residences, we acknowledge that there are several outstanding issues, including how to certify Peer Support Specialists, that require more in-depth discussion and analysis. That is why we support H.B. 5248, which would create a task force to determine the best course of action.

The following individuals submitted testimony in support of this bill:

Ronald Abell Sally Arbott Anna Assad Annie Atwood Nicole Baier Aleska Bembnista Rhiannon Benedetto Tammy Binnette Linda Bishop Michele Brabant Jennifer Bradshaw Juliana Bregler Deborah Brown Colleen Buckle y Jennifer Cederberg Shah Chirayu Aprille Coutss Sharon Dean Terri -Lynne DeFino Matt DeSimone Emily Dionne Traci Eburg Emily Elander Melissa Florio Anna Marie Fraioli Allie Franco Donald Franco Heather Franklin Cynthia Fusco Mihirkumar Gosrani Melissa Grandinetti Michael Grube Morgan Grube Brianna Herbest DelVina Herbest Thomas Herr Cheryl Hill Julie Hulse Leah Hulse Alyssa Kassimis Christopher Keller Jennifer Kelley Jennifer Kocenko Lynn Kovack Tracey Kurjiaka Patrice Lago, RN EMT Sandra Lasher -Pelton Susan Leonard Tiffani Little Strongbow Lone Eagle Mandi MacDonald Frank Manni Cassandra Marden Scott Martin Mariah Martirano Erin Mccauley Ann Metzger Rebecca Miller Patrick Mitchell Anthony Morrissey Maddy Morrissey, Heidi Norcross Michelle Palermo Amy Plude Elizabeth Poller Sachs Randi Hailey Ranson Cathy Renzulli-Valente Ted Roman Terry Sachs Joy Scozzafava Alison Sherman Makayla Showalter Melissa Silva Lone Eagle Sonny Melissa Storms Leanne Swanson Pinedo Nadine Tannous Amanda Tarallo Tyler Ulisse Austin Ulisse Naomi Ulisse Casey Villa Miranda Villa Sharon Villa Brittany Waldron Danielle Walker Donovan Ward Margaret Watt Lisa Winjum Patricia Zelno

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed

Reported by: Diane Kubeck

Date: April 14, 2020