

Testimony in support of

**H.B. No. 6588: AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND
SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES**

**Insurance and Real Estate Committee
Public Hearing, March 9, 2021**

Good Evening Representative Wood, Senator Lesser, Senator Anwar, Representative Comey, ranking members Hwang and Pavalock-DAmato, and Distinguished Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee and a special shout out to Rep. Dathan:

My name is Nicole Hampton and I live in Norwalk. I am woman in recovery from alcohol use disorder and mental health. I work as a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist at Norwalk Hospital and I volunteer at Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery in Bridgeport. I also co-chair the Catchment Area Council, Area 1 & 2, 3 & 4 and co-chair the Billable Peer Support Group.

I want Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 6588. I am testifying in support of **Section 5** of HB 6588, which would establish a statewide task force to study insurance reimbursement for peer services. Establishing the task force would elevate and formalize the discussion at a state level and make officially recognized recommendations ahead of the next session.

In Connecticut, if we are to increase pathways to the peer workforce and improve upon recovery outcomes, we must make Certified Peer Recovery Specialists reimbursable. Peer support services are an evidence-based practice and Medicaid reimbursable in over 41 states for certified peers.

The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, but connection! My first CPRS connected with me in many ways no one else could. He treated me like a human being! He was empathetic, resourceful and my cheerleader even when I wasn't cheering! This clearly demonstrates the benefits of lived experience. He inspired me to pay it forward! I went on to obtain my CCAR, Recovery Coach Professional Designation and my CPRS state certification through the Connecticut Certification Board which follows specific standards of responsibility, validity and legal defensibility to protect the population we serve! The Certified Peer Recovery Spec099

Bottom line, peer support offers opportunity to reclaim a life of self-defined purpose! I, myself work on the Community Care Team of Greater Norwalk. I'm able to coordinate care with numerous community and municipal providers, and help break down barriers and overcome setbacks experienced by the population I serve. It would be amazing if peer support services could be on a self-referral basis! Imagine being able to call your insurance provider for a list of Certified Peer Recovery Specialists just like you can call for a list of therapists!

I am humbly asking for you to please support HB 6588 and help Connecticut take critical steps towards improving our system of care through essential peer support services. The billable

peer support group I co-chair has all the relevant stakeholders coming to the table and interested if the committee would like me to provide them with names.

I am open to any and all questions.

Respectfully and thank you for your time today.

Nicole Hampton, Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, Recovery Coach Professional

MORE TALKING POINTS:

- Prevent the further corruption of the peer support role
- Utilize peers for their strengths
- Define the flexibility through a broad job description: time, notes, location
- Not tied to medical necessity
- Small case loads (less than 15 people)
- Self referral
- Fair wages - at least \$24 rate of pay, full-time employment and benefits.
- Recovery-oriented NOT an add on to the clinical, medicalized institutional care model
- Peer supports are tokenized - "we have our recovery specialist -we are all set"
- Peer supports offer a connection back to the community and step out of the revolving door of the mental health and addiction service system
- Peer support offers opportunities to reclaim a life of self-defined purpose.

OTHER LANGUAGE / WORKING DEFINITIONS:

"Peer support is the process of giving and receiving non-clinical assistance to achieve long-term recovery from severe psychiatric, traumatic or addiction challenges. This support is provided by peer supporters - people who have "lived experience" and have been trained to assist others in initiating and maintaining long-term recovery and enhancing the quality of life for individuals and their families Peer support services are inherently designed, developed, delivered, evaluated and supervised by peers in long-term recovery." (*Definition adapted from White, W. (2009).*

Peer-Based Addiction Recovery Support: History, Theory, Practice and Scientific Evaluation)

Via SAMHSA:

"The role of a peer support worker complements, but does not duplicate or replace the roles of therapists, case managers, and other members of a treatment team. Peer support workers bring their own personal knowledge of what it is like to live and thrive with mental health conditions and substance use disorders. They support people's progress towards recovery and self-determined lives by sharing vital experiential information and real examples of the power of recovery. The sense of mutuality created through thoughtful sharing of experience is influential in modeling recovery and offering hope." (*Davidson, L., Bellamy, C., Guy, K., & Miller, R. (2012). Peer support among persons with severe mental illnesses: a review of evidence and experience. World Psychiatry, 11(2), 123-128.*)

Peer support encompasses a range of activities and interactions between people who share similar experiences of being diagnosed with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, or both. This mutuality—often called “peerness”—between a peer support worker and person in or seeking recovery promotes connection and inspires hope. Peer support offers a level of acceptance, understanding, and validation not found in many other professional relationships (Mead & McNeil, 2006). By sharing their own lived experience and practical guidance, peer support workers help people to develop their own goals, create strategies for self-empowerment, and take concrete steps towards building fulfilling, self-determined lives for themselves. (S. Mead, C. MacNeil - *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 2006)

Via MHA:

“Peer support specialists provide emotional, informational, and other transformative support to people with mental health conditions and substance use disorders based on their personal lived experience and knowledge of behavioral health systems and supports. Fully integrated health care is designed to meet the behavioral and physical needs of an individual and is proven effective in reducing symptoms of mental health condition(s) and helping people get into and stay engaged in recovery. Adding peers to the care teams will help promote recovery and improve equity by reducing health disparities and increasing the ability of care teams to reflect the communities they are serving.” (<https://www.mhanational.org/what-peer>)