

General Law Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5223

AN ACT EXPANDING THE PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR
Title: REGULATED PROFESSIONS TO INCLUDE PHARMACISTS.

Vote Date: 3/15/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/1/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

General Law

Co-Sponsors

Rep. Devin R. Carney, 23rd Dist

Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would allow pharmacists to be able to benefit from the program called Health Assistance InterVention Education Network (HAVEN). HAVEN is an independent non-profit corporation that was founded by the CT State Medical Society, CT Nurses Association, CT State Dental Association, CT Veterinary Association and CT Academy of Physician Assistants, to provide confidential support and consult to healthcare professionals facing issues with substance abuse, behavioral or mental health issues and/or physical illness. Pharmacists are not able to access the program and it is time to add them to the program.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the pharmacists after February 9, were instrumental in the distribution of the vaccines, both in their retail stores and long-term care facilities; the program placed significant stress on the pharmacists, many looked for ways to help cope with the stress. Very often coping involves substances, pharmacists worked tirelessly during the COVID-19 pandemic to do their jobs and vaccinate.

Proposed Substitute Language

Section 4 has substitute language regarding DCP's collecting of fees and fees charged.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Maureen Magnan, Deputy Commissioner of Consumer Protection, State of Connecticut

DCP supports this bill and believes that pharmacists should have access to this important program, the concern is about how the bill is drafted, including how the provider of the services would be paid. DCP prefers that the pharmacy statutes be amended to add to the professional assistance program language, this would make sure that pharmacists won't be overlooked. The funding mechanism in lines 427 to 432, also should be amended so that the revenue for this program is from a portion of the licensing fees and a professional assistance account established at the DCP.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Dr. Sean M. Jeffery, Director of Pharmacy, Hartford Healthcare Integrated Care Partners

The challenges that healthcare professionals faced during the pandemic were a fixture on the nightly news for months. No one was immune from the pandemic. Pharmacists administered 229.2 million doses of the vaccine in their retail stores across program and that includes the 8 million doses given in long term care facilities. This caused many pharmacists to seek ways to deal with the stress and strain that lead to substance abuse and alcohol disorders. These same "healthcare heroes" are not afforded access to professional assistance programs. Dr. Jeffrey has practiced in Connecticut since 1998, he does not remember his licensure fee being increased during this time, he supports the DCP of Drug Control to raise his professional fees in order to offer this valuable service to Connecticut pharmacists.

Janet Kozakiewicz, MS, PharmD, FASHP, Treasurer of Health Assistance InterVention Education Network (HAVEN)

As a member of the Executive Board of HAVEN, and a pharmacist, Ms. Kozakiewicz has sought to educate the Board and the various pharmacy professional organizations on the need for pharmacists to have access to the services offered by HAVEN. In the past, she has served as a Director of Pharmacy for several hospitals, she has seen firsthand the toll substance abuse disorders have on pharmacists and pharmacy students. The question is what we do when this addiction is discovered. Funding is of concern and the current reliable funding, in place since 2015 has been static, void of cost-of-living adjustments. Though she is a strong advocate for allowing pharmacists access to HAVEN, the program cannot be extended to accommodate pharmacists without an identified, reliable, and adequate source of additional funding. One of the toughest decisions she has ever had to make was to confront an employee with an alcohol or drug dependence issue. The journey until we as a profession and you as government leaders help us to right the course of making health and wellness resources and confidential accountability for care and treatment available to pharmacists.

Stephanie McGuire, RN, MSN, APRN, NP-BC, GRC chair and Kimberly Sandor, RN, MSN, FNP, Executive Director, CT Nurses Association, Connecticut Nurses Association

The CT Nurses Assoc. agrees that the pharmacist community in CT should be eligible for HAVEN services as valued healthcare professionals. Also, it is recognizing that it is important that expanding the services is financially accomplished, so HAVEN remains fiscally confident to provide their services in the future. The suggestion that additional funding come from collecting late fees is both exceedingly unreliable and very likely underfunded. An equitable solution would be to minimally provide the organization \$5.00 per pharmacist

license as is presently assessed to the other professionals' licenses. It is respectfully encouraged to explore other funding strategies as well. They look forward to supporting the legislatures efforts to support our pharmacy colleagues as reliable funding to cover costs of including them in our HAVEN client population that we serve.

Dr. Christina Polomoff, Population Health Clinical Pharmacist, Hartford Healthcare Integrated Care Partners

Dr. Polomoff supports pharmacists being included in HAVEN. This will help protect pharmacists who have issues with substance use and other health conditions that impact their ability to do their jobs. She supports raising the professional licensure fee to accomplish this.

Maureen Sullivan Dinnan, J.D. and Mariella LaRosa, J.D. HAVEN

In 2007, the legislature realized that the fear of professional discipline and stigma associated with mental health and other treatments needed to be addressed and HAVEN was created to encourage early identification of the healthcare professionals that needed assistance. They support HB5223 on a condition of adequate funding, if this funding is not identified then the professional assistance program cannot be expanded. If funding is inadequate, then HAVEN would not be able to support the bill. HAVEN welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the Committee and affected parties to ensure this bill accomplishes it's the shared goal.

Nathan Tinker, CEO, Connecticut Pharmacists Association

CT Pharmacists Association believe that pharmacists should be provided professional rehabilitation outside of the courts or public disciplinary action, this will improve patient safety. CPA is working with HAVEN and DCP to identify the best way to connect pharmacists into the HAVEN program, including appropriate fee schedule and precise statutory language. The concept is strong, and the services are important.

Yale NewHaven Health

Yale New Haven Health System supports HB5223. This would give pharmacists a confidential alternative to public disciplinary action for professionals suffering from chemical dependence, emotion and behavioral disorders or physical or mental illness.

Reiham Barmo, UConn PharmD Candidate 2022, UCONN School of Pharmacy

Pharmacists are excluded from HAVEN assistance program and are not allowed equal opportunity to access rehabilitation. As a pharmacy student it is important to know that there are programs embedded into State law that provide the necessary assistance and support.

Phirin Khen, Uconn School of Pharmacy

Supports the bill as it creates a voluntary and confidential pathway for pharmacists to seek help and rehabilitation. Pharmacists should not be an exception to the HAVEN program. Pharmacists are exposed to risk developing chemical dependency, behavioral disorder and physical illness. As a future pharmacist it will give more security knowing that there is access for pharmacists to the HAVEN program.

Alice Rivard, UConn School of Pharmacy, PharmD Candidate 2022

Supports the bill as it gives pharmacists the same opportunity to participate in the assistance program that is granted to other healthcare professionals.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed

Reported by: Bonnie Gray, Asst. Clerk

Date: 3/23/2022