



Scott Brabant  
Board Chair

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW  
President & CEO

**Testimony in OPPOSITION to  
S.B. No. 1, Section 2: AN ACT EQUALIZING COMPREHENSIVE ACCESS TO MENTAL,  
BEHAVIORAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC**

**Public Health Committee Public Hearing  
Wed., March 17, 2021**

Good afternoon Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Representative Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Suzi Craig and I am the Registered Lobbyist and Chief Strategy Officer at Mental Health Connecticut (MHC). MHC provides community-based services across Connecticut, and we have offices in six areas – Stamford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, Torrington, Danbury, and West Hartford – providing services that support the four pillars of recovery: home, health, purpose, and community.

MHC is submitting testimony in **opposition** to **Section 2 of SB 1**, which would authorize the Commissioner of Public Health to provide the certification and education of peer support specialists in the state. **MHC respectfully requests that Section 2 is removed from SB 1.**

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, during a public hearing for the Insurance and Real Estate Committee, MHC testified in **support of Section 5 in HB 6588: AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES.**

HB 6588 will establish a statewide task force to study insurance reimbursement for peer services, based on the current process for certification. This bill is highly supported across the state in the mental health and addiction service and recovery communities. This bill will allow for a meaningful and representative process to be carried out that will inform further development of the peer workforce in Connecticut.

Peer support services are vital to the work of health care teams across the state. A path for receiving certification is currently in place. The proposed task force in HB 6588 will be charged with ensuring that Connecticut joins the 41 other states that allow for Medicaid reimbursement for certified peers.

At MHC, everything we do is based on evidence-based practices that support the recovery model. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the working definition of recovery is this: "Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential."

Peer support services is an essential role on health care teams to support the recovery process. A peer supporter is "someone who has experienced the healing process of recovery from psychiatric, traumatic



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and/or substance abuse challenges and, as a result, can offer assistance and support to promote another peer's own personal recovery journey.”<sup>1</sup>

A peer support worker complements the roles of therapists, case managers, and other members of a treatment team. Data on peer support specialists shows that their work helps to improve quality of care and reduce health care costs by providing alternatives to hospitalization, reducing the length of hospital stay, and preventing rehospitalizations.

At Mental Health Connecticut, we employ peers at our Independence Center at Waterbury, and actively seek to hire individuals with lived experience. Our peers are an essential part of our direct care team and, knowing the value they bring to our program participants in the recovery process, we want to see this workforce grow. Outside of MHC, other agencies and in other places across the state where, especially in moments of crisis in emergency rooms, in the community, during the judicial process, or in any of the multitude of other situations, anyone can benefit from the support of a trained peer worker.

Insurance coverage for peer support is an investment in decreasing health care costs, improving the long-term health of our CT friends and neighbors, and expanding a much-needed workforce in our health care teams.

**Section 5 of HB 6588** is important because its purpose is to study “any means available to increase health insurance coverage for peer support services provided to individuals in this state.” The peer worker role provides trauma-informed, non-clinical assistance and is:

- Considered an evidence-based practice by SAMHSA and is Medicaid reimbursable in over 41 states for certified peers<sup>2</sup>
- An active part of health care teams in all 50 states and U.S. territories, and has grown to over 24,000 supporters in the workforce<sup>3</sup>
- An opportunity for qualified candidates to work in private practice alongside mental health professionals, primary care, Emergency Departments, and supervision roles

Please **remove Section 2 from SB 1** and **support the passage of Section 5 in HB 6588**.

Thank you for your time and for your service,  
Suzi Craig  
Registered Lobbyist  
Chief Strategy Officer

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<sup>1</sup> National Association of Peer Supporters: <https://www.peersupportworks.org>

<sup>2</sup> Mental Health America “Peer Support Research and Reports”: <http://www.mhanational.org/peer-support-research-and-reports>

<sup>3</sup> Mental Health America “Peer Support Research and Reports”: <https://www.mhanational.org/peer-support-research-and-reports>