

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

Public Health Committee

Public Hearing, March 17, 2021

Good Afternoon Respective Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Carol Cruz, and I am a registered voter in Milford, Connecticut.

I am testifying today in opposition of Section 2 of SB 1, AN ACT EQUALIZING COMPREHENSIVE ACCESS TO MENTAL, BEHAVIORAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC. This section seeks to authorize the Commissioner of Public Health to provide for the certification and education of peer support specialists and specify the peer support services that a certified peer support specialist may provide to another individual in the state.

This section is concerning, and further consideration is needed.

Currently, the State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services endorses a statewide curriculum and examination of peer support specialists, known as Recovery Support Specialists, who are employed by behavioral health service organizations and agencies. In addition, the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery offers a nationally recognized educational program for Recovery Coaches. Recovery Coaches are employed across the Connecticut, and in many other states.

On March 9th, the Insurance and Real Estate Committee held a public hearing to hear HB 6588, AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES. Section 4 of HB 6588 will establish a statewide task force to study insurance reimbursement for peer services. This bill is highly supported across the state in the mental health and addiction service and recovery communities.

Please strike Section 2 from SB 1 and support the passage of HB 6588. 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.

In my previous testimony on March 9th, I shared how my lived experience inspired me to become a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, so that I could help others on their pathway to recovery. So, I oppose this S.B. No. 1, because I believe the integrity and authenticity of the peer recovery role will be compromised if we are required to get our credentials and certification under the Commissioner of Public Health, which is mainly for licensing individuals. There are many reasons why peer recovery supports are non-clinical, it is so we can literally meet people where they are at, without bias or an agenda, and to build rapport and trust. If we were clinical,

we would look no different than a Licensed Drug and Alcohol or Behavioral Health Counselor, which I am not nor do I care to be.

The [Connecticut Certification Board](#) IC & RC ([International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium](#)) meets all the required and necessary standards for someone to get their [CPRS certification](#) in this state, and they are providing updated curriculums for individuals to continue on in their career for recertification. The process in which to become a CPRS was not easy for me, but it was accessible especially for someone with an undiagnosed learning disability who did not want to get into debt and commit to a student loan.

We must trust the science (data) of what is working and keep building a better workforce platform for the peer recovery role rather than moving us over to another agency which knows nothing about us. We know the art (human connection) of peer recovery services and how its process has worked successfully alongside person-centered care for many decades and is growing stronger every day.

So, please support HB 6588 and help Connecticut take critical steps towards improving our system of care through essential peer support services.

Respectfully,

Carol Cruz

Carol Cruz, CPRS
c23cruz@gmail.com
203-507-4223