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Testimony by Marcia DuFore
On behalf of the Amplify, Inc.
Public Health Committee

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

March 17, 2021

Dear Senator Mary Daugherty Abrams, Representative Jonathan Steinberg, and Members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly,

My name is Marcia DuFore and I am a registered voter in the town of Suffield, Connecticut. I am testifying as Executive Director on behalf the Amplify, Inc., the Regional Behavioral Health Action Organization (RBHAO) for North Central Connecticut, member of the Connecticut Prevention Network (CPN), NAMI, and Keep the Promise Coalition (KTP).

I am testifying in support of several sections of SB 1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access To Mental, Behavioral And Physical Health Care In Response To The Pandemic and in opposition to Section 2.

Amplify is one of five Regional Behavioral Health Action Organization (RBHAO) charged by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to act as their strategic community partner for planning, education, and advocacy to address behavioral health needs and services for children and adults in North Central Connecticut.

Amplify's mission is to strengthen the ability of the North Central region to advance healthy and inclusive communities. One of the ways that we support this mission is by conducting needs assessments. Every two years, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) Planning Division carries out a statewide needs assessment and priority planning process in order to capture needs and trends on the local, regional, and statewide levels. We see much of SB 1 aligned with and responsive to the needs of our community members and partner organizations.

Section 2 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 2 of HB 6588 will establish a statewide task force to study insurance reimbursement for peer services. We testified in support of that bill. 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.

Section 6 seeks to declare racism as a public health crisis for the State of Connecticut. We are pleased to see this section included in the bill and are highly supportive.

Section 17 requires the collection of data in a standardized manner that allows for aggregation and disaggregation of data. We have already testified in support of this section at the public hearing for HB 6424.

Section 18 seeks to promote the investment of Community benefits program to promote preventive care and to reduce racial ethnic, linguistic, sexual orientation and gender identity, and cultural disparities in health and to improve the health status for [working families and] all populations of risk in our communities. We have already testified in support of the section at the public hearing for HB 6550.

Senate Bill 1 is packed with many other sections that will support better health and inclusion for Connecticut residents. We thank you for your thoughtful consideration of all of these issues and hope you will take our comments in consideration as you deliberate.

Sincerely,

Marcia DuFore