

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 Sharon Hanford. I am a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, A Recovery Support Specialist, and a Recovery Coach Professional.

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.

Within this section I believe is concerning as the role of a peer and identifying as one could taint the authenticity of my role with the peers I work with. I would like further consideration on this bill before it is passed.

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 and countries. Both designations along with others offered in our state can be used towards obtaining the Certified Peer Recovery Specialist certification through the Connecticut Certification Board. The CPRS certification is the only one in the State of Connecticut. A certification must be done by a third party removed from the initial training process. A certificate program or designation should not be confused with certification.

The Connecticut Certification Board, through the overarching governing body of the International Credentialing & Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC), an organization of 80 individual certification boards around the world, offers the standardized, valid and reliable, and legally defensible Certified Peer Recovery Specialist certification. The expertise of the Connecticut Certification Board does not lie in the provision of peer services but in credentialing in the behavioral health arena. Keeping our state certification under the CCB would allow us to make changes in real time vs waiting for legislation if under DPH.

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. This bill is highly supported across the state in the mental health and addiction service and recovery communities.

I have earned my designation of Recovery Coach Professionalism through Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery, I have earned my Recovery Support Specialist through Advocacy Unlimited, and I have taken the exam for my State Certified Peer Recovery Specialist at an independent testing center. Working as peer, the Certification that I have earned as a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist provides my employer and the peers, I work with the non-bias fact that I have proven my knowledge and ability in Ethics, Advocacy, Mentoring and Education and Recovery Wellness/ Support.

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.

Respectfully and in Service,
Sharon Hanford, CPRS,RSS,RCP