

March 2, 2021

TESTIMONY SUPPORTING SB-572:
AN ACT CONCERNING COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE TEAMS
AND REENTRY CENTERS

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Vice-Chairs Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Ranking Members Senator Miner, Representative France and all distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jonathan Steinen. I am a registered voter in the town of West Hartford. I am writing this testimony to voice my support for funding of alternative services geared toward individuals who are experiencing a mental, or behavioral, health crisis. More specifically, I am endorsing the appropriation of funding for Peer Respite centers in all five of Connecticut's mental health catchment areas.

Peer Respite have become widely recognized as being a more compassionate and effective alternative to hospitalization in psychiatric facilities that often require admission through the traumatizing setting of an emergency department. Peer Respite typically provide welcoming, homelike environments that offer support, tools and education for managing crisis while fostering wellness and recovery. Clients can attend to obligations in the community (such as work or accessing supports) while having a safe space to return to. Respite are staffed by professionals with lived experience- Peers. These facilities are located within the communities that they serve and usually offer additional drop-in services.

I am an individual who is in recovery. I have been hospitalized several times, utilizing psychiatric and substance abuse treatment services within the state. At the time of my last crisis, I owned a contracting business and was the sole provider for my former wife, son and my then expected daughter. I was forced to choose between running my business and providing for my family or seeking treatment. Because of the financial implications, I felt forced to put off my treatment. If I had the option of a peer respite, I may have been able to get treatment before my crisis snowballed to the epic proportions that resulted in the loss of my marriage, house, and business and left me in a Hartford emergency psych department with suicidal ideations. It might also be noted that, for several years prior, my business provided steady income for three or more craftsmen.

Having had these traumatic experiences and having realized that the most pivotal moments in my recovery were influenced by peers, I felt compelled to become a trained Recovery Support Specialist. I am employed by one of the largest providers of behavioral health services in Connecticut and I work in the field of emergency psychiatry. I can testify to the fact that many our patients feel the experience of being hospitalized is traumatic. Patients often use these services because it is their last resort or only option. Many are brought in against their will with police and EMS involvement. Peer Respite would provide a welcome alternative for many of these individuals as well.

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that nearly one in five U.S. adults live with a mental illness. The CDC reports that between 1999 and 2018, the total suicide rate in the United States increased 35%. We are experiencing a public health crisis because our current mental health system is failing. **Peer support** was declared an **evidence-based practice** by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services in 2007. Nearly twenty years of documented Peer Respite history in this country provides compelling evidence to support that Peer Respite are a more compassionate, less expensive and highly effective alternative to hospitalization for many individuals in crisis. It is my hope that you will lend your support to funding the establishment of Peer Respite within our state and continue to support funding for the operation of these Respite for years to come.

Thank you for considering this testimony and for your service to the residents of Connecticut.