



DATE: March 5, 2020
TO: Public Safety and Security Committee
FROM: Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance
RE: **H.B. 5285 An Act Concerning Mental Health Training for Paramedics**

Good morning Senator Bradley, Representative Verrengia, Senator Hwang, Representative Sredzinski and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee.

My name is Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide association of community nonprofits. Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving half a million people in need and employing 117,000 people across the State. They are an important part of what makes Connecticut a great place to live and work and an important piece of our economy.

The Alliance is opposed to H.B. 5285 An Act Concerning Mental Health Training for Paramedics, which would eliminate the requirement that applicants for paramedic licensure complete Mental Health First Aid training.

Just as CPR training helps a person with no clinical training assist an individual following a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid training helps a person assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis, such as contemplating suicide. In both situations, the goal is to help support an individual until appropriate professional help arrives.

Mental Health First Aid training equips paramedics with the critical skills needed to identify and respond to the signs of mental illness and substance use. The course introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental health and substance use conditions, builds understanding of their effects and how they manifest, and provides an overview of common treatments and where to find them locally. Through role-playing and interactive exercises, the training provides participants concrete, context-specific skills to assess a mental health or substance use crisis, provide initial help and connect people to professional, peer, and social support systems as well as self-help resources.

The Alliance sees this training as indispensable for first responders who are consistently on the frontlines of Connecticut's mental health and substance use crisis. Community nonprofits are the day-to-day providers of mental health care in the state, and therefore, we strongly urge the legislature to preserve the existing training requirement. Community nonprofits have a strong base of Mental Health First Aid trainers ready to provide training capacity to ensure timely and effective implementation of the training requirement.

The Mental Health First Aid program is supported and implemented by the National Council for Behavioral Health and its network of 82 state association members, including The Alliance. The National Council engages in fidelity monitoring of its instructors, which is designed to ensure that they are staying

faithful to the program and manages an ongoing certification and recertification process so that the training is always up to date on the best practices. The program is implemented by local nonprofits, community groups, businesses, and government agencies. This means that certified instructors are often local and from the communities they serve.

We urge you to keep this training requirement because it has a significant and proactive impact in the lives and safety of some of our most vulnerable citizens. Thank you for your time and consideration of these important issues. **We urge the Committee to take no action on H.B. 5285.**

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