



DATE: March 29, 2021

TO: Public Health Committee

FROM: Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance

RE: **S.B. 1087 An Act Concerning the Recruitment and Retention of Health Care Providers in the State**

Good morning Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Representative Petit and members of the Public Health 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding S.B. 1087 An Act Concerning the Recruitment and Retention of Health Care Providers in the State. The bill seeks to promote the recruitment and retention of behavioral health professionals in Connecticut, a significant need of community nonprofits.

Section 1 of the bill re-establishes the State Loan Repayment Program, available to medical providers who work in Health Professional Shortage Areas, designated by the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Section 3 establishes a pilot program for the Department of Public Health to repay loans for behavioral health professionals that choose to work at Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC). While this is a laudable goal, we respectfully request the Committee expand access to the State Loan Repayment Program in Section 1 to behavioral health clinicians working at all nonprofit community providers, which would allow the State to receive some federal matching funds and would help all community providers serving people in need recruit and retain behavioral health professionals.

The communities that FQHCs serve in Connecticut are also being served by a wide range of other nonprofit providers of behavioral health services such as Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, Local Mental Health Authorities, Outpatient Psychiatric Clinics for Children, Methadone Clinics, Opioid Treatment Programs, and many more. Addressing the needs that all of Connecticut's community providers, including FQHCs, have in recruiting and retaining behavioral health professionals would be better served by re-establishing the State Loan Repayment Program and expanding access to behavioral health professionals employed in the nonprofit sector.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these important issues.