



Date: March 12, 2021
To: Judiciary Committee
From: Jeff Shaw, Senior Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, The Alliance
Re: [S.B. 960](#), An Act Concerning Pretrial Alcohol and Drug Education Programs.

Good morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Jeff Shaw, Senior Director of Public Policy & Advocacy of the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide advocacy organization representing the nonprofit sector. Community nonprofits provide essential services to over half a million individuals and families in Connecticut every year, and employ 14% of Connecticut's workforce, improving the quality of life in communities across the State.

The Alliance **supports S.B. 960, An Act Concerning Pretrial Alcohol and Drug Education Programs, and efforts to expand Pre-Trial Intervention Programs (PTIP).**

As background, Pretrial Alcohol Education Programs are available for people arrested for the first time for operating a motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, including people under the age of twenty-one. It is also an option for people previously arrested for these offenses who used a similar program to avoid a conviction, as long as the original offense was over ten years ago without any other arrests or convictions. Similarly, the Pretrial Drug Education Program is available to people arrested for possession of drugs or drug paraphernalia. Both programs are run by community nonprofits, taking the form of group education or substance use treatment, based on clinical recommendations.

There are two issues the legislation should address that would help community nonprofits that run these programs. The first issue is **lack of timely access to the program**. In order to run group education, a minimum number of participants need to be registered with the program. Current trends show a decrease in referrals to PTIP, possibly due to increased use of ride sharing services as well as the effect of decriminalization of marijuana. Fewer referrals means it takes more time to get a full group to start. These delays can result in people waiting 6-12 months to start the program, thereby extending their charge, involvement with probation, reinstatement of license.

The bill aims to increase efficiency. Merging Level 1 (10 sessions) and Level 2 (15 sessions) offense curriculums into a standard, 12-session program for both offender types, would assure timely access to programming. Such changes should decrease the wait time and remove barriers.

Secondly, **these programs run on tight margins and covering costs is difficult**. While the costs are the responsibility of the participant, unless determined indigent by the referring court, nonprofits have faced increase operational costs over time, many exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. An example, setting up telehealth systems, seemingly overnight, to run groups virtually was very expensive. Expenses associated with virtual programs; purchasing devices, training staff, acquiring licenses, upgrading cybersecurity protections, increasing IT staffing, etc., are not necessarily reimbursed by the State or federal COVID-19 relief funds. Thus,

an increase in participants would help providers address new costs as well as for participants, who may be more comfortable continuing their program in virtual groups.

Thank you for your consideration.