



DATE: March 9, 2021
TO: Insurance & Real Estate Committee
FROM: Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance
RE: H.B. 6588 An Act Concerning Mental Health Care and Substance Abuse Services.

Good afternoon Senator Lesser, Representative Wood, Senator Hwang, Representative Pavalock-D'Amato and distinguished members of the Insurance and Real Estate 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 more than half a million people in need and employing 117,000 people across the State.

Community nonprofits provide behavioral health services—mental health and substance abuse treatment—to people across Connecticut. They are an important part of what makes Connecticut a great place to live and work and an important piece of our economy.

Through their missions and their contracts with the State, they serve all clients and provide them the care they need, regardless of their ability to pay. Many people served by community providers are Medicaid recipients, but many others have commercial insurance, which community providers bill for services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today **in support of H.B. 6588 An Act Concerning Mental Health Care and Substance Abuse Services**, particularly Section 5, which would establish a task force to study health insurance coverage for peer support services in Connecticut.

Peer support services are recovery-focused services provided by specialists who have experience recovering from mental health or substance abuse conditions. They are a crucial part of behavioral health treatment, and a growing body of **evidence and experience shows that peer support services are effective** at treating mental health conditions and helping people recover from addiction.

Connecticut does not require commercial insurance companies to cover peer support services, even though they have been proven effective to help people recover from mental health and substance abuse conditions. Connecticut also does not allow peer support services to be billed through Medicaid, even though many other states do.

While this important service should be available to all Connecticut's residents, we acknowledge that there are several outstanding issues, including how to certify Peer Support Specialists, that require more in-depth discussion and analysis. That is why we support H.B. 6588, which would create a task force to determine the best course of action.

We also encourage the Insurance and Real Estate Committee to work with your counterparts on the Human Services Committee, who are considering S.B. 764 AAC Medicaid Providers. Section 2 of that bill

would allow Peer Support Specialists to bill Medicaid. **We encourage the Committee to include Medicaid in the task force that H.B. 6588 would create.**

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