



**State of Vermont  
Office of the Secretary of State**

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**Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Secretary of State  
S. Lauren Hibbert, Deputy Secretary**

**February 14, 2024**

**To: Hon. Emilie Kornheiser, Chair  
House Committee on Ways and Means**

**From: S. Lauren Hibbert, Deputy Secretary of State  
Lauren Layman, General Counsel, Office of Professional Regulation**

**Re: H.847 – An act relating to peer support provider and recovery support specialist certification**

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding H.847.

### **Pathway to the Recommend Certification**

The Office of Professional Regulation has been involved in legislative conversations about peer support and recovery support for several years. In the last two years, there has been a study group who has focused on the best way to regulate peer support and recovery support in the state. OPR has been an active stakeholder in that study group. OPR agrees with the study group's recommendation that certification is the correct level of licensure and recommends passage of this bill even though the traditional path of a Sunrise Review under 26 V.S.A. Chapter 57 has not been completed.

### **Structure and Benefits of the Certification**

Peer support and recovery support will be given training and a third-party certification. OPR will receive the third-party certification and issue a State of Vermont certification. Certification means that people who are not state certified can practice in this field; but only people OPR certifies will be able to say they are certified peer support and recovery support specialists.

This is being established as an advisor profession. OPR will rely on appointed advisors to establish the program, draft and implement the rules, and if necessary, review applications and enforcement complaints.

The benefits of certification through OPR are that clients and facilities will be able to rely on the certification as a base level indication of competency. The public will have a layer of protection because

there will be a complaint, investigation, and adjudicatory process for when a peer support or recovery support specialist engages in unprofessional conduct. Additionally, this structure will enable reimbursement for the provision of services through Medicaid/Medicare and private insurance.

### **Costs of Implementation and Ongoing Support for the Program**

The Office of Professional Regulation is funded by licensure fees which are put into a special fund. At this point this bill establishes a licensure fee of \$115 and a renewal fee of \$50. We do not know the number of people that will seek this certification, so it is difficult to assess if these are adequate fees to support the program.

We are anticipating that implementing this program will be approximately \$25,000. We are asking for a general fund allocation to support the implementation of this program. Historically, OPR has not requested funds for this purpose; however, we have recent experience which shows us that setting up a new program requires extensive work and costs for our staff and system. Because of our recent experience with massage therapists and residential home contractors and OPR's current budget forecast, we are requesting a general fund allocation at the outset for new programs. Examples of our set-up costs include:

- OPR will conduct extensive outreach during the rulemaking process;
- Rulemaking will take multiple months and significant staff time;
- Rulemaking has a cost of approximately \$2,600; and,
- OPR will need to establish this program in our IT system.