

February 1, 2024

Testimony to the House Committee on Health Care – Bill 24-0641

Dear Madam Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the importance of recovery coaching in the overall well-being of individuals and families working through the challenges of substance use disorder and addictive behaviors.

I grew up in the shadow of addiction in a blue-collar town in the industrial Midwest outside of Chicago. My father, like his father before him and most of his co-workers and friends, drank daily. It was part of life. For my father, however, drinking took his life. Long before he died during his second stint of alcohol detox treatment when I was a teenager, he became unrecognizable to friends and family and an outcast in the community.

It wasn't until years after his death I came to learn about the traumatic events that interrupted his life, a life full of promise and hope, resulting in a life of pain, loss, self-medicating and ultimately addiction. I never got to meet the once brilliant, fun-loving, kind-hearted young man that would become my father. Addiction and its underlying causes were not fully understood at the time, nor was the impact of addiction on family members and the greater community.

I was at once drawn to the collaborative and strength-based nature of recovery coaching that uses the evidenced-based approach of Motivational Interviewing, 'a particular way of talking with people about change and growth to strengthen their own motivation and commitment' (Miller & Rollnick, 2023). At our center in Addison County, recovery coaches are offered weekly supervision in a Learning Community format where coaches can check-in, maintain and build coaching skills, and get support with challenging cases.

For the last three years I have coached individuals and family members whose lives have been derailed by addiction and have witnessed the positive impact recovery coaching has made in helping people make significant changes in their lives. Recovery coaching can be one-on-one interactions, group facilitation, and community outreach at schools, shelters, treatment centers and community centers. Recovery coaches also receive additional training to work as recovery coaches in emergency departments and in correctional facilities across the state.

Bill 24-0641 seeks to license Peer Recovery Coaches which would legitimize the valuable work already being done throughout the state and create stability in workforce funding through Medicaid reimbursement and solidarity of training and supervision standards. This seems like the natural evolution of the profession and would place recovery coaches on continuation of care teams alongside medical and mental health professionals. It would also reduce the stigma that is often associated with recovery services and normalize using recovery supports as part of overall health and wellness. Thank you for your commitment to improving delivery of services and promoting the well-being of individuals, families and communities.