



February 28, 2024

Testimony
House Human Services Committee – Bill 847

Dear Madam Chair

Peer Recovery Coaching within Vermont's Recovery Centers has been a growing and powerful tool in working with guests. We have watched this service grow over the past 14 years. In the beginning we had a Recovery Coach Academy where people in recovery for at least a year who wanted to be a coach would go to train. Subject matters like boundaries, ethical guidelines, self-care, active listening, and developing a recovery plan of action would be discussed. Upon returning to the recovery center newly minted peer recovery coaches would receive supervision in-house and furthered learnings from staff on community and in-house resources and continued learnings around ethical issues and boundaries. Let me clear, Peer Recovery Coaching is not a clinical service. It is peer-to-peer support service and a powerful one at that.

As the years have passed peer recovery coach supervision has become more formalized in the recovery centers and now to be a certified peer recovery coach one needs to continue to learn and a certain CEU's are required every two years to keep your certification. This all has helped professionalize the role of the peer recovery coach. In my former role as the Executive Director of the Turning Point Center of Chittenden County I had a 3-year period of recovery required before one could become a Certified Peer Recovery Coach. For me this group of coaches were our elite group of peer recovery coaches. I wanted to make sure they had a solid foundation of recovery before they began their work helping support others usually who were early in their recovery.

So here we are with Bill 847 which would license Peer Recovery Coaches. Is there a reason why you are calling them Recovery Support Specialists? I believe you are referring to Peer Recovery Coaches. I noticed in the language of the current bill there is no mention of the word **Peer** Recovery Coaches. All Recovery Coaches are people in recovery themselves or family members of someone in recovery. I also noticed that you do not have any mention of a Code of Ethics for Recovery Support Specialists. All Peer Recovery Coaches sign a Code of Ethics before they begin their work. That needs to be added to the language of this bill. I noticed it is mentioned for the Peer Support Providers (mental health). That is a cornerstone of the peer work being done in recovery centers throughout Vermont. Another area that needs close attention is background checks. I noticed it on page 9. Many of our recovery coaches have a justice involved history. When decisions are made around what constitutes an offence that could prohibit someone from becoming a Certified Recovery Specialist, I hope we are involved in that decision.



In summary, I strongly support the bill. In my best picture scenario, I probably would suggest separating the two professions into two bills. It is confusing and hard to ferret out if all the important components are in the recovery support specialists' side of things. I think you would want to know why the language is Recovery Support Specialists versus Peer Recovery Coaches. The word Peer needs to be added before Recovery Support Specialists. You probably need to define the word Peer as well. Again, mention of a Code of Ethics needs to be a part of the components of a Peer Recovery Support Specialist.

I think this is a terrific move forward. The state is looking to be able to bill Medicaid for this service and this bill would solidify Peer Recovery Coaching as a legitimate professional service that deserves reimbursement from insurance programs. Thank you!!