





September 1, 2020

Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 803 (Beall) Peer Support Specialist Certification and Peer Support Services – REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Newsom,

The undersigned coalition of organizations representing consumers, providers, counties, and other behavioral health stakeholders write to express our unified support for SB 803 (Beall) and to respectfully request your signature to help the many Californians suffering with behavioral health challenges. SB 803 establishes a peer support specialist certification program for behavioral health services and adds peer support services as a Medi-Cal covered benefit for counties that choose to provide this important service.

Peer support is an evidence-based, cost-effective model of care proven to reduce costly hospitalizations and homelessness, increase participation in treatment, and improve service experience. Peer support specialists are self-identified consumers who use their lived experience along with skills learned in formal training to assist others in their recovery from mental illness. Forty-eight states recognize their value and have a certification process in place or in development for mental health peer support specialists. These 48 states already enjoy the significant cost savings peers deliver.

However, in California there is no statewide scope of practice, standardized curriculum, training standards, supervision standards, or certification protocol for peer support services. SB 803 will define the service of

peer support, provide a standardized scope of practice, ethics, and competencies. SB 803 will ensure practitioners receive standardized training and demonstrate competency in providing peer support services.

Certifying peer support specialists to provide peer support services in Medi-Cal is more important than ever with the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn wreaking havoc on the mental health of all Californians. Nearly 11% of American adults seriously considered suicide this June, according to CDC data. The June CDC data showed 30.9% of survey participants reported symptoms of an anxiety or a depressive disorder, 25.3% reported a traumatic or stressor-related disorder (TSRD), and 13.3% said they were using substances to cope with the pandemic's stressors. The CDC data exemplifies the need for an urgent response to the growing behavioral health crisis.

The sharp rise in behavioral health disorders triggered by COVID-19 is likely to linger long after the end of the pandemic itself, thus highlighting the need for an effective, comprehensive, and economically viable behavioral health care response. SB 803 is a critical component of that response. Peer support specialists are a workforce with experience in successfully navigating their own behavioral health crises and training to help and support others on the path to recovery. The ability of peers to connect with those in need and exemplify the path to wellness is vital in the aftermath of the pandemic.

With amendments to SB 803, California can expand the behavioral health workforce and add evidence-based peer support services in this critical time with minimal to no state General Fund contributions. In recognition of the need and value of peers, county behavioral health agencies will provide the Medi-Cal nonfederal share to ensure Californians can access peer support services.

We, the undersigned coalition, strongly urge you to sign SB 803.

California Association of Mental Health Peer Run Organizations
County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
Steinberg Institute

Alameda County, District Attorney's Office
Alameda County Network of Mental Health Clients
Alum Rock Counseling Center
BestNow
California Access Coalition
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California American College of Emergency Physicians
California Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives
California Association of Local Behavioral Health Boards and Commissions
California Association of Public Hospitals and Health System
California Behavioral Health Planning Council
California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies
CaliforniaHealth+ Advocates
California Institute for Behavioral Health Solutions
California Mental Health Advocates for Children and Youth
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
California Psychological Association
California School Nurses Organization
California State Association of Counties
California Youth Empowerment Network

Cal Voices
Children NOW
County of Santa Clara
Crestwood Behavioral Health, Inc.
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Disability Rights California
Local Health Plans of California
Mental Health America of California
Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission
Mirai.Global
National Alliance on Mental Illness, California
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Santa Clara County
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Solano County
National Association of Peer Supporters
National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter
Painted Brain
Peers Envisioning & Engaging in Recovery Services
Project Return
Psychiatric Occupational Therapy Association
Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition
Santa Clara Family Health Plan
SEIU California State Council
Seneca Family of Agencies
The Arc / UCP California Collaboration
The Children's Partnership
United Parents
Western Center on Law and Poverty
Women's Wisdom Art
2020 Mom

cc: Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Will Lightbourne, Director, Department of Health Care Services
Dr. Kelly Pfeifer, Deputy Director, Behavioral Health, DHCS
Michelle Baass, Undersecretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
John Connolly, Deputy Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Richard Figueroa Jr., Office of Governor Newsom
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Carol Gallegos, Deputy Director, Legislative and Government Affairs, DHCS
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