



February 19, 2026

**House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 612 - Correctional Education and Workforce Skills Training Programs - State Correctional Ombudsman and Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Training Program for Incarcerated Individuals

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

BHSB strongly supports HB 612 - Correctional Education and Workforce Skills Training Programs - State Correctional Ombudsman and Certified Peer Recovery Specialist Training Program for Incarcerated Individuals. This bill would create a training program for incarcerated individuals to become certified peer recovery specialists. The lived experiences of many incarcerated individuals provide ideal backgrounds for becoming a peer recovery specialist and would help to expand the certified peer recovery specialist workforce.

Certified peer recovery specialists play an important role in the public behavioral health system and in supporting those seeking recovery from behavioral health disorders. A strong body of evidence demonstrates their effectiveness across numerous settings such as corrections, hospitals, and in treatment programs.¹ Maryland should be commended for recognizing their value, creating a strong certification process, and providing Medicaid reimbursement for services provided in substance use settings. These were important steps towards integrating peers into the treatment system.

Certified peers could contribute much more, however, if additional policies were put in place to expand the certified peer recovery workforce. Maryland is facing a severe behavioral health workforce shortage which needs a multifaceted set of strategies to address. A 2024 report commissioned by the Maryland Health Care Commission concluded that the state was lacking 32,800 behavioral health workers which included a shortage of 8,029 social and human service assistants (the category that includes peers).² Peers could also address other workforce shortages like shortages of counselors and community health workers.

HB 612 would create a new training program for incarcerated individuals to obtain their peer certification while incarcerated administered across several state departments. This program would help to increase the availability of certified peers and help returning citizens to have employment opportunities upon release. Such structure and the opportunity to use their lived experiences to help others would be a strong force for stability and a successful transition back to the community.

Training incarcerated individuals to become certified peer recovery specialists would help address behavioral health workforce challenges and help reduce recidivism. **BHSB urges the House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee to support HB 612.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142

References:

¹Stack E, Hildebran C, Leichtling G, Waddell EN, Leahy JM, Martin E, Korhuis PT. Peer Recovery Support Services Across the Continuum: In Community, Hospital, Corrections, and Treatment and Recovery Agency Settings - A Narrative Review. *J Addict Med.* 2022 Jan-Feb 01;16(1):93-100. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8339174/>.

² Maryland Health Care Commission. *Investing in Maryland's Behavioral Health Talent.* October 2024. Available at: https://mhcc.maryland.gov/mhcc/pages/plr/plr/documents/2024/md_bh_workforce_rpt_SB283.pdf