



Maryland Alliance for Sensible Drug Policy

LIVED EXPERIENCE. REAL SOLUTIONS.

February 19, 2026

The Honorable Heather Bagnall
Chair, Health Committee
241 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB886 - Certified Peer Recovery Specialists - Coverage Under the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance and Workgroup on Certification- FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the committee:

I'm submitting this testimony in **strong support of HB 886** on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for Sensible Drug Policy, a statewide advocacy group led by people with lived or living experience with substance use.

This bill would require Medicaid and commercial insurance plans to cover services provided by Certified Peer Recovery Specialists and would create a workgroup to improve and streamline Maryland's peer certification process. To put it simply, this bill recognizes the important role played by peers across the continuum of care.

In the real world, peer recovery specialists are not just "nice to have." They are often the reason someone gets connected to care and stays connected long enough for it to have a meaningful impact. Whether a person is using substances, trying to reduce their use, or working to stabilize early in recovery, the system can feel like a maze with many locked doors. A peer specialist is there to assist with the parts of the system that frequently cause people to fall through the cracks: showing up, following through, fighting stigma, and connecting to resources. Most importantly, peers work to establish enough trust that someone will stay engaged in the process. And peers are doing this lifesaving work in settings across the continuum of care:

- **Harm reduction programs** – Peers build trust, help people obtain safer use supplies, and connect with critical services such as wound care, emergency housing, and treatment for those who want it.
- **Emergency departments** – After an overdose or a medical crisis related to substance use, people often struggle with fear, shame, and withdrawal. This is when they are most vulnerable and most likely to leave the hospital and return to use. Peers help them process what happened and start the conversation about what to do next. Instead of "here's a pamphlet, good luck," peers facilitate warm handoffs to community service

providers, helping ensure people receive the follow-up care they need to break the cycle.

- **Treatment** – Once a person has made the decision to enter treatment, peers help them remain engaged. They help individuals talk through fears and problem-solve real-life challenges that often cause people to leave treatment, such as unstable housing, transportation problems, court obligations, childcare, and employment issues. In addition, peers help people process brief returns to use, so that a slip does not become a full relapse.
- **Recovery support services** – Once the focus of the work has shifted from “getting started with treatment” to “creating a life that allows continued change to happen,” peers can help individuals connect with recovery housing and other stable resources, develop routines, build community, establish goals, and handle stressors that prompt individuals to return to use. Furthermore, peers help maintain connections to ongoing care over time, rather than only during a crisis, which is often what allows people to continue making progress in their recovery.

This bill recognizes the reality that often goes overlooked – Certified Peer Recovery Specialists provide lifesaving services across the continuum of care. Their contribution needs to be recognized and in our health care system that means it needs to be eligible for reimbursement by insurance. For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Committee to issue a **Favorable Report on HB 886.**

Respectfully submitted,



Thomas Higdon
Executive Director
Maryland Alliance for Sensible Drug Policy