



February 19, 2026

**House Health Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 886 - Certified Peer Recovery Specialists - Coverage Under the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance and Workgroup on Certification

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.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore strongly supports HB 886 - Certified Peer Recovery Specialists - Coverage Under the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance and Workgroup on Certification. This bill would provide Medicaid and private insurance coverage for certified peer recovery specialists in all settings including both substance use treatment and mental health treatment. This expansion of coverage would provide additional resources for peer-delivered services and help address Maryland’s behavioral health workforce shortage.

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 provide funding and structure to their services. 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. Attracting and training the peers needed to fill this gap demands new reimbursement options.

HB886 would expand Medicaid coverage to all settings and direct private insurance carriers to begin reimbursing for certified peer recovery specialists. The Maryland certification process gives insurance carriers the structure and billing codes needed to reimburse these services and trust their efficacy.

It would be important to ensure some grant funding continues for peer-delivered services that are not direct clinical treatment and to make sure peers services are properly distinguished from other services, but we feel HB 866 would be a strong step towards further integrating these important professionals.

Peer recovery specialists are a critical component of the behavioral health ecosystem and deserve to be reimbursed as such. **BHSB urges the House Health Committee to support HB 886.**

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, Korthis 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