

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: HB0886 Certified Peer Recovery Specialists

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: 02/09/2026

My name is Lauren Karnes and I am a Forensic Peer Recovery Specialist for the MD Office of the Public Defender. Forensic Peers are individuals with lived experience in both substance use and/or mental health recovery and the criminal justice system. Today I submit this testimony on my own accord and not as a representative of MOPD.

I am respectfully requesting that the Committee issue a favorable report on **House Bill 0886, which requires the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and certain insurers to provide coverage for peer services and also requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to provide certain workgroups for peer recovery certification.**

As someone who works directly within Maryland's behavioral health and recovery system, I have witnessed firsthand both the strengths of our current infrastructure and the areas where improvement is critically needed. House Bill 0886 presents an important opportunity to strengthen the integrity, accessibility, and consistency of Maryland's certification and recertification processes.

A central component of this legislation, the requirement that the Maryland Department of Health convene specific workgroups to examine and improve certification and recertification procedures, is especially significant.

Certification and recertification processes directly impact workforce stability, service quality, and ultimately, client outcomes. When processes are unclear, inconsistent, delayed, or burdensome, the consequences ripple throughout the behavioral health system. Providers may experience workforce attrition, peer specialists and treatment professionals may face unnecessary administrative barriers, but most importantly, individuals seeking services may encounter delays or reduced access to care.

By convening structured workgroups, MDH can bring together key stakeholders such as providers, peer recovery specialists, treatment professionals, and advocates to collaboratively examine timelines and administrative efficacy to set a new, gold standard of care and transparency. This would lessen the barriers to entry and retention within the workforce. This change would provide the ability to streamline the documentation process, providing oversight, guaranteeing equity as well as accessibility within certification pathways.

Workgroups create space for data-driven discussion and practical problem-solving. Rather than implementing policy changes in isolation, this collaborative approach ensures that reforms are informed by those directly navigating the system every day. This not only strengthens policy outcomes but also builds trust between the state and the workforce it regulates.

In a time when Maryland continues to confront substance use and behavioral health challenges, we cannot afford unnecessary inefficiencies within our credentialing systems. Strengthening certification and recertification processes supports professional accountability and service quality, all of which are foundational to protecting vulnerable Marylanders.

House Bill 0886 does not simply add administrative requirements; it creates a thoughtful mechanism for evaluation, modernization, and improvement. The workgroup model reflects responsible governance, one that is measured, inclusive, and solution-oriented.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 0886. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Submitted by: Lauren Karnes

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