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August 7, 2020

The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez
Assembly Appropriations Committee, Chair
California State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Senate Bill 803 (Beall) Peer Support Specialist Certification-SUPPORT AS AMENDED

Dear Assembly Member Gonzalez,

The California Behavioral Health Planning Council (CBHPC) strongly supports Senate Bill 803, as amended. We are pleased to join our numerous colleagues who also support this legislation including California counties, health/mental health organizations and advocates who are calling upon the state to standardize high-quality peer and family support services.

The Council is under federal and state mandate to advocate on behalf of adults with severe mental illness and children with severe emotional disturbances and their families. We are also statutorily required to advise the Legislature on mental health issues, policies and priorities in California. The Council has long recognized an existing disparity in mental and behavioral health and advocated for policies and services that will address the issues of access with the attention and intensity they deserve.

The Council has long advocated for the use of peers in the health system. We currently lead a Workforce and Education Committee to identify solutions for the workforce shortage. The standardization of a program to certify Peer Specialists in the state of California is a major step to increasing access to care, services and treatment. The employment of Peer Specialists would facilitate a behavioral health workforce that is more culturally, linguistically, faith, gender and recovery-sensitive to those are under- and unserved in the public behavioral health system.

Peer providers who use their life experience with mental illness and recovery, coupled with skills learned through formal training, have proven to be a valuable addition to service delivery in mental health settings. Research demonstrates that use of qualified peer support specialists has measurable benefits to consumers, including reduced hospitalizations, improved functioning, alleviation of depression and other symptoms, and enhanced self-advocacy. A peer support program also creates a career ladder so that consumers and family members working in mental health care have the opportunity to fully contribute, translating their experience into meaningful employment. Just as important, establishing a state certification program would enable

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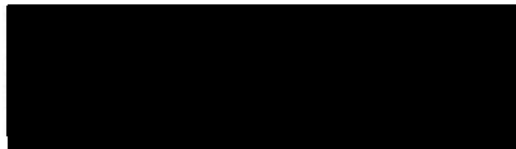
California providers to bill federal Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California) for 50 percent of the cost of services provided by certified peers for counties that opt in. It would also enable us to quantify and track the valuable work and the diversity of this segment of the service delivery system. This is a crucial advantage, as it allows for peer services to become a sustainable piece of the state's mental health care delivery system.

California has been a national leader in cutting edge policies and programming to better meet the needs of individuals living with serious mental illness. However, California is one of the last remaining states that has not implemented peer certification. Voter approval of Proposition 63 indicates the value of the voice and contributions of persons with lived experience but somewhere we lost that vision.

The time has come for California to embrace peer support as an evidence-based model and put in place a certification program that will standardize this best practice. SB 803 makes sense from both a policy and fiscal perspective, and will result in a more comprehensive and effective approach to mental health care, as well as increase access through this addition to the workforce.

It is for these reasons that we respectfully urge all members to join us in supporting SB 803 Peer Provider Certification. If you have any questions, please contact Jane Adcock, Executive Officer, at (916) 750-1862 or Jane.Adcock@cbhpc.dhcs.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Lorraine Flores
Chairperson

Cc: Honorable Assembly Appropriations Committee Members
Tom Steel, Office of Senator Beall
Sunshine Borelli, Office of Senator Beall