

Public Health Committee Hearing

S.B. 370 AN ACT CONCERNING PEER-RUN RESPITE CENTERS FOR PERSONS EXPERIENCING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS.

March 13th, 2024

Mindy Wallen

Good afternoon Senator Anwar, Representative McCarthy Vahey, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee.

My name is Mindy Wallen. I am a certified recovery support specialist as well as the parent of a young adult with chronic mental health issues.

I am here to testify in support of SB 370, Peer Run Respite centers.

As the parent of a 24-year-old with a long history of psychiatric hospitalizations I have witnessed the value of peer respite services first-hand. After a string of over 20 psychiatric hospitalizations between the ages of 13 and 15 years old, it was a wrap-around intensive in-home program that provided peer support services to my family and my child that interrupted the never-ending cycle of ineffective and traumatic treatment programs and allowed our family to heal and find footing in recovery. At 17 years old, my child courageously came out as non-binary/gender non-conforming. It was then that I decided to move our family out of Texas to Connecticut in search of more inclusive safe spaces for my child as they moved into adulthood. While I have been impressed with the mental health and social service supports available in Connecticut compared to Texas, it has still been challenging to access ongoing mental health supports that are safe and informed for young adults who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community. We have powered through in isolation at times when intensive treatment would have been beneficial for fear of adding additional trauma in existing treatment settings. I have witnessed the consistent misgendering, lack of education, and all-out judgment my child has experienced while accessing medical and mental health services. I do not blame them for being afraid to seek treatment knowing they will not see themselves reflected in their treatment team or peer groups. I also know that the invasive and often restrictive approach to in-patient hospitalization is not what my adult child needs during times of crisis. What they need is a safe, supportive, trauma-informed environment that will provide encouragement and companionship while they work to stabilize. This is the spirit of peer respite centers, and I cannot emphasize enough what a game-changer having access to this type of programming would be for my adult child and honestly for me as their sole source of support.

Therefore, I am asking that you please pass this bill and create Peer Run Respites, including specialized centers for Transgender/gender expansive, BIPOC, and Spanish speakers, in Connecticut to provide humane and voluntary support to people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Peer respite centers are on the cutting edge of trauma-informed mental health treatment. They are cost-effective and proven to be successful throughout the country. I wake up every day to stories of young lives tragically lost due to a lack of support and outright hatred directed toward the LGBTQ+IA community. The fear I have of losing my child too early is real. Passing this bill will bring us one step closer to peace of mind and hope for a brighter future.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak and share my lived experience about what this would mean to my family!

Mindy Wallen