

April 27th, 2022



Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Governor's Health Care Bill S2774

Dear Chairs, Senator Cindy Friedman, House Chair Representative John Lawn, and committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts and concerns on Governor Baker's health care bill. We write to you as the Massachusetts Peer Workforce Coalition, a collective of peer professional leaders representing Recovery Coaches (RCs), Certified Peer Specialists (CPSs), Community Health Workers (CHWs), Family Partners (FPs), Young Adult Peer Mentors (YAPMs), and Certified Older Adult Peer Specialists (COAPSs). Over the past few years, we have met consistently in a collaborative effort regarding training, expanding diversity, equity and accessibility within our programs, and sharing best practices. We have increased our efforts to navigate the abrupt and intense demand for mental health and addiction services in our communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Collectively, we represent a group of over 5,000 front line public health and behavioral health professionals. Massachusetts is racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse. The bill's peer workforce board composition language lacks the equitable and diverse peer representation as well as the expansion and effectiveness of a growing peer workforce, an undeniable asset to the healthcare system. We cannot risk losing momentum in building this workforce capacity during an addiction and mental health epidemic.

We write to you today to request the removal of Section 52 of the Governor's health care bill which proposes a Board of Registration of Certified Peer Workers (CPWs) under the Department of Public Health (DPH), which currently does not accurately reflect the roles we represent.

The proposed Board would be charged with approving applications, renewals, and reinstatement requests across all peer professions. Notably, this Board would also be the sole body in Massachusetts capable of authorizing training, establishing a code of ethics, and setting standards for the peer roles we represent. Please know the health care bill as written does not recognize that each of these roles have **already** carefully developed their own code of ethics, tailored training, rigorous standards, and paths to certification which demonstrate exacting expertise. These distinctive codes, trainings, and standards reflect the unique characteristics of each peer role, as well as the grassroots input and consensus building that is a hallmark of peer work itself.

Our overriding concern is that plans for the Board of Registration of Certified Peer Workers, as outlined in the health care bill lacked meaningful input from the multiple peer workforces this Board will be charged with overseeing. The value of the peer workers voices needs to be recognized. It is important to value lived experience as well as honor the strides made during recovery that does justice beyond what might be found in a CORI (Criminal Offender Record

Information) check. Each of our member groups understands and advocates for the nuances in interpreting CORI findings and can expand on examples upon request.

The structure of the proposed board is based on the Board of Certification of CHWs, also housed under DPH. Ten years after its inception in 2012, this board has not been able to finalize training and certification requirements, nor have they been able to meet other goals.

The Massachusetts Peer Workforce Coalition (PWC) enthusiastically and collaboratively welcomes the opportunity to engage with the administration to craft an informed plan for a Board of Registration of Certified Peer Workers that values and reflects the expertise, insights, and diversity of the peer workforce in Massachusetts and truly supports the unique and impactful work of individuals in peer roles. Please contact us if you would like more information or to find a time to schedule a meeting with the coalition. We appreciate your time and attention.

Sincerely,

The Massachusetts Peer Workforce Coalition