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ADVANCING BRAIN HEALTH POLICY & INSPIRING LEADERSHIP

April 2, 2019

The Honorable Anthony Portantino
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
California State Capitol, Room 2206
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 10 (Beall): Medi-Cal: Peer Support Specialists Certification-SPONSOR

Dear Senator Portantino,

The Steinberg Institute is a leading nonprofit public policy institute that supports and encourages effective and comprehensive mental health policymaking. We are the proud sponsors of SB 10 (Beall) that would call upon the state to standardize high-quality peer and family support services.

SB 10 would establish a Peer, Parent, Transition Age and Family Support Specialist Certification Program to be administered by the Department of Health Care Services. Peer providers who use their life experience with mental illness and recovery, coupled with skills learned through formal training, have proven a valuable addition to service delivery in mental health settings. Research demonstrates that use of qualified peer support specialists has measurable benefits to clients, 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.

Across California, peer providers are already utilized in many settings. However, there is no statewide standard of practice, consistent curriculum, training standards, supervision standards, or certification protocol.

Creation of a state certification program, as laid out in SB 906, would:

- Define the service of peer support.
- Standardize the quality of services provided by peer support specialists.
- Assure that practitioners receive standardized training and demonstrate competency.
- Allow for portability of certification to other counties and providers in the state.

Just as important, establishing a state certification program would enable California providers to bill federal Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California) for 50 percent of the cost of services provided by certified

peers. 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.

In 2007, the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) sent a guidance letter to all state Medicaid directors emphasizing, "peer support services are an evidence-based mental health model of care which consists of a qualified peer support provider who assists individuals with their recovery from mental illness and substance use disorders." CMS encouraged states to establish a state certification process for training, credentialing, supervision and care coordination. (CMS, SMDL #07-011)ⁱ

Currently forty-eight states plus the District of Columbia and the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs have implemented protocols to certify peer specialists, and four additional states are in the process of creating certification programs, enabling the majority of states to leverage Medicaid funds. *And yet, California has not acted!*

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 best practices. SB 10 makes sense from both a policy and fiscal perspective, and will result in a more comprehensive and effective approach to mental health care. It is for these reasons that we proudly sponsor SB 10.

Sincerely,



Adrienne Shilton
Government Affairs Director

CC: Honorable Members, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Senator Beall, Author

ⁱ United States Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Guidance Letter to State Medicaid Directors, SMDL #07-011, August 15, 2007.

<http://downloads.cms.gov/cmsgov/archived-downloads/SMDL/downloads/SMD081507A.pdf>