

Testimony
Senate Bill 2032 - Department of Human Services
Senate Human Services
Senator Judy Lee, Chairman

January 8, 2019

Chairman Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, I am Pamela Sagness, Director of the Behavioral Health Division of the Department of Human Services. I appear today to provide testimony on Senate Bill 2032.

Senate Bill 2032 authorizes the Behavioral Health Division within the Department of Human Services to develop and implement a program for the certification of peer support specialists. This bill also includes an appropriation of \$275,000 and one full-time equivalent position to develop and administer this new service.

A peer support specialist is a person who uses his or her lived experience of recovery from mental illness or addiction, or both, plus skills learned in formal training, to deliver services in behavioral health settings to promote recovery and resiliency. Peer support has existed in the behavioral health field for decades; however, its rapid growth in recent years is due to the increasing evidence supporting its effectiveness.

Given the growing evidence base for the effectiveness of peer support services both in terms of quality of life, outcomes for individuals and in terms of cost savings to counties and states due to reductions in rates of hospitalization, these efforts have the potential to make significant improvements to the behavioral health system.

A variety of programs and efforts have been made in the previous years to increase access to this service. The Behavioral Health Division has hosted seven peer support specialist trainings in 2018 and trained 193 individuals. Peer support services are currently being provided and reimbursed through the Free Through

Recovery and Substance Use Disorder Voucher programs. The Behavioral Health Division is also in the contracting process with Lutheran Social Services to develop and support a statewide rural, faith-based peer support network. Lastly, a Request for Proposal is being posted to integrate peer support specialist services into high risk access points for individuals with a behavioral health disorder.

To be most effective and sustainable, peer support services must be delivered according to national practice standards in a manner that maintains the integrity of peer support. Senate Bill 2032 provides the necessary authority to professionalize peer support as part of the state's behavioral health workforce and to build foundation in an effort to seek reimbursement for this service.

Peer Support Certification has potential to address Human Services Research Institute Behavioral Health System Study recommendations #3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13.

This concludes my testimony, and I am happy to answer any questions.