

Mr. Chairman and Committee members,

My name is Dustin Eddy, I currently reside in District 7 and I am testifying on behalf of my support for Senate Bill No. 2012. I'm a community member in recovery from mental health and the consequences of substance use disorders.. I'm thankful to be newly employed by the West Central Human Service Center as a Certified Peer Support Specialist since July of last year. As peer support I can use my lived experience to help our clients stay engaged and inspire hope until they find their own paths to recovery, which in turn has strengthened my own recovery.

I find it coincidental that this BILL is No. 2012 because it was in the year 2012, I found myself facing an uncertain future with felony charges resulting from a DEA controlled sting operation in Ward County for delivering and conspiring to deliver a controlled substance, marijuana. Having never really been a drug dealer, but rather a drug addict, I was not prepared to navigate a future being locked up in the system. It was during my 7-month jail stay that The North Central Human Service Center sent a Psychiatric team to visit us in jail, so I requested an appointment to be seen. It was during that appointment I was told they couldn't help me because they were only there to prescribe medication and all I wanted was someone to talk to. I eventually realized I was fortunate to be in a jailhouse full of experts that I was able to confide in after my prejudices had faded. I was also grateful for a few local church groups that visited us twice a week for fellowship. I used what little bit of commissary I was gifted to buy pencils, paper, envelopes and stamps to keep in touch with my family members across the country since I was not a native of North Dakota and had nobody that could afford to call or visit me.

My point to that story is that had there been a peer support specialist on North Central's treatment team, then they would have had another tool besides medication to offer me. Someone to listen with empathy and compassion might have helped me get through my anxiety, depression and fear of the unknown. As a Certified Peer Support Specialist on West Central Human Services team, I am that guy, but unfortunately I am the only one so far. And I get it, not everybody has the drive and passion for peer support to maintain 3 other jobs and are fortunate to have a spouse with a sufficient income to provide a roof over their head and health insurance. A Certified Peer Support Specialist is still just a temporary position at West Central that comes with no benefits and an hourly compensation of \$16.85. This winter I've felt hardships with snow days and holidays forcing me to take time off without pay. I have used every trick in the book I could think of to compensate, from taking advantage of being allowed to come into work a ½ hour early, taking ½ hour lunches and staying a ½ hour later as allowed by the center I still come up short of 40 hours a week. My family life suffers while I work an additional 3-4 nights a week, and weekends just to make ends meet.

I'm lead to believe that if this BILL passes, then the Department of Health and Human Services will be able to afford to make Peer Support Specialist a permanent position with benefits and a competitive wage that will attract others with a passion to help those who are still suffering in our communities with mental health and substance use disorders. I believe it's our peers that we truly learn from, they can understand us and how we think and are willing to communicate and reach us no matter what level we are on in our lives. Inspiring us to use or abstain from substance use and holding us accountable unlike the professionals who have higher standards and set boundaries to protect themselves. We can recover and I stand before you as proof, thank you for lending me your ears.