

Claire Bullis

District 21-02

Senate Bill NO. 2166

Good morning, my name is Claire Bullis and I am a peer support specialist at Lighthouse Church in Fargo.

It may not be evident to the outward eye, but I have struggled with mental health conditions that did not materialize overnight since I was a teenager. Many of us who battle with mental illness, have endured years of silent suffering, and countless treatment plans that were deemed “unsuccessful” or “with little resolve” and know what it is like to be void of any hope that life may improve. We know how easy it is to be tempted by the illusion of a safety net when desperation or exhaustion sets in. For some, that safety net is substance abuse. For others, it is not leaving home for days or weeks at a time because the world can be a frightening place. For me, it was starving or cutting myself until the thoughts that had taken up permanent residence in my head became a little quieter.

For years I had doctors and treatment providers placing me into the box of what they thought recovery looked like - but that I did not fit into it. As a result of this, at 21 years old I was put onto a quality-of-life care plan. At times I often felt like more of a problem than a person. I had professional healthcare support but had no real support from others who completely understood what I was going through.

I truly believe the 1915i program and peer support recovery services have the potential to help fill the gap in the behavioral healthcare system. Over the past year, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact it has had on the lives of its participants. As stated earlier, mental health conditions affect people of all ages and upbringings. We have found there to be a wide spectrum of functioning and severity in the participants we serve. By matching a peer support specialist with similar demographics or life experiences as the participant, we have seen the benefits that follow as a result of the connections built. Observing someone slowly unravel the unfounded beliefs that have been ingrained into their psyche by a society that is often quick to judge has been nothing short of incredible. Knowing you aren't alone and having someone to walk the path of recovery next to you can be transformative.

Over the past year, I've seen tremendous growth, healing, and self-discovery in the lives of many of the individuals we work with on 1915i. By establishing goals that are individualized with the participant's needs, input, and values as the focus, we can gather a better understanding of what recovery looks like to them and where support is needed most. For some that may mean showering regularly and taking their medication as prescribed. For others, it may mean getting back into the community or workforce after spending years cycling through institutional care settings. For people who struggle with their mental health, achieving those goals is monumental and requires a great amount of perseverance. Being able to walk alongside others who share the same life challenges has been a mutually beneficial journey.

I am reminded daily that even though setbacks occur, and bad days arise, hope still exists and there's no such thing as too far gone.

With additional funding for the behavioral health programs we work with such as 1915i, I believe the opportunities for expansion, additional training and education, and diversification will benefit our communities in both the immediate time and long-term future. We that the success we have seen so far can be continued and furthered with your support.