

August 5, 2020



**Submitted Via Web Portal**

The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez, Chair  
Assembly Committee on Appropriations  
California State Capitol, Room 2114  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SB 803 (Beall): Mental Health: Statewide Certification for Peer Support Specialists – SUPPORT AS AMENDED**

Dear Chair Gonzalez,

Mental Health America of Los Angeles (MHALA) has been and continues to be a staunch supporter of efforts to establish professional standards and certification for high-quality peer and family support services in California.

The need for expanding and adding to the behavioral health workforce has never been more pressing. It is becoming quite apparent that the pandemic and the necessary but unprecedented actions needed to help lessen its physical harm have and will continue to have profound impacts on the emotional wellbeing of millions of Californians. To point to just one indicator, calls to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's disaster distress hotline increased 891 percent from March 2019 to March 2020.

With this pandemic, we are also witnessing that history, unfortunately, has a way of repeating itself, especially when it comes to the disparate impact of disasters on vulnerable communities of color as well as people experiencing, or on the verge of, homelessness. This history tells us we must now prepare as best we can for a likely spike in suicides, which similarly occurred between 2008 and 2010 due to that severe economic crisis.

Put simply, California will need to have every possible means at its disposal to help contend with this coming wave of need. SB 803 will help to provide the much-needed tool of support services offered by qualified peer support specialists. In addition to being backed by research demonstrating their effectiveness, peer support programs create career ladders which allow consumers and family members working in mental health care to have the opportunity to fully contribute, translating their experience into meaningful employment.

When it comes to behavioral health, California is often hailed as being at the forefront of care, but this is sadly not the case when it comes to peer support services. Forty-eight other states plus the District of Columbia and the U.S. Department of Veteran's affairs have already decided to implement protocols to certify peer specialists. The statewide standard of practice, consistent curriculum, training standards, supervision standards, and certification protocols established by SB 803 will allow California to finally catch up with the rest of the country.

For these reasons MHALA is pleased to lend its support to SB 803.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chad Costello', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Chad Costello, CPRP  
Vice President, Policy