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WASHINGTON, D.C. (December 15, 2023) The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) applauds the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee for passage of the *SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Reauthorization Act* with special thanks Senator Tim Kaine, the bill's sponsor. The bill, which now heads to the Senate floor, includes several provisions Kaine secured to support individuals living with mental health conditions and address mental health workforce shortages.

"I'm glad the HELP Committee has advanced the SUPPORT Act, which will provide support for those in recovery" **said Kaine**. "The bill include[s] provisions I've worked to secure, including support for peer support specialists, who play a crucial role in the recovery process, and resources to expand access to recovery programs.... I look forward to working with my colleagues to bring these bills across the finish line."

The bill supports prevention, treatment, and recovery services for individuals with substance use disorder and mental health challenges. Kaine successfully secured provisions in the legislation for Peer Support Specialists, including provisions from the bipartisan [*Providing Empathetic and Effective Recovery \(PEER\) Support Act*](#), legislation to codify the Office of Recovery at the SAMHSA and help peer support specialists serving individuals recovering from a mental health condition by removing barriers to certification and practice.

The *PEER Support Act*, would elevate the role of 'peer support specialists,' individuals who have lived experience with a mental health condition and are certified to assist individuals and their families in recovery through advocacy, relationship and community building, resource sharing, mentoring, goal setting, and more. Although peer support specialists have been shown to reduce re-hospitalization for individuals with mental health conditions, peer specialists often face significant barriers to certification and practice. The *PEER Support Act* would help remove these barriers, address workforce shortages in the field, and expand access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

"Through their own experiences, peer support specialists play an important role in the recovery process. The *PEER Support Act* would better support these experts and expand access

to care by identifying best practices, providing support for training, and addressing barriers facing prospective peer support specialists” **said Kaine.**

Specifically, the *PEER Support Act* would:

- Codify the Office of Recovery in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to:
 - Train, educate, and support the professional development of peer support specialists.
 - Research and publish best practice recommendations for the training, certification, and supervision of peer support specialists for entities that employ these professionals.
 - Recommend career pathways for peer support specialists.
- Instruct the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Department of Justice (DOJ) to conduct a study to research states’ screening processes for prospective peer support specialists that may pose undue barriers to their certification and to provide evidence-based recommendations for overcoming those barriers. Many prospective peer support specialists cannot get a license because of their past interactions with law enforcement related to addiction (i.e. convictions for possession of drugs) prior to recovery, even though their past experience recovering from drug use makes them strong advocates for those who are currently in recovery.
- Direct the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to revise the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system to recognize peer support specialists as a profession, which would help ensure accurate data reporting on the field.

“It is exciting to see work done on the national level to support the Peer Specialist Profession,” said Michael Pollock, DBSA CEO. “Trained peer supporters make an incredible difference in helping people find wellness, and this bill positions peer support specialists to be a lifeline throughout the mental health care system. This will help secure more individuals with lived experience to enter the field and will only enhance the amazing work they do in our communities.”

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The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is a leading peer-focused mental health organization whose mission is “to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders.” DBSA reaches millions of individuals with support, educational resources, and tools to help individuals living with mood disorders lead productive and fulfilling lives. Additionally, through our advocacy efforts we amplify peers’ voices and work towards systemic change in the delivery of mental health care.

For more information, please visit www.DBSAlliance.org or call (800) 826-3632.

