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**Sent:** Tuesday, April 8, 2025 2:21 PM

**To:**

**Cc:** Koehler, Samantha (Kaine) <Samantha\_Koehler@kaine.senate.gov>

**Subject:** FW: Kaine & Banks Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Support Mental Health Care and Substance Use Disorder Recovery

**From:** Fisher, Mia (Kaine) <Mia\_Fisher@kaine.senate.gov>

**Sent:** Tuesday, April 8, 2025 11:18 AM

**To:**

**Subject:** Kaine & Banks Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Support Mental Health Care and Substance Use Disorder Recovery

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## **Kaine & Banks Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Support Mental Health Care and Substance Use Disorder Recovery**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Jim Banks (R-IN), members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, introduced the *Providing Empathetic and Effective Recovery (PEER) Support Act*, bipartisan legislation to support mental health care and substance use disorder recovery. Specifically, the bill would elevate peer support specialists—individuals with lived experience with a mental health condition or substance use disorder who are certified to assist individuals and their families in recovery through advocacy, relationship and community building, resource sharing, mentorship, goal setting, and more. Although peer support specialists have been shown to [decrease substance use](#) for individuals with substance use disorders and [reduce re-hospitalization](#) for individuals with mental health conditions, they often face significant barriers to entering or staying in the profession. The *PEER Support Act* would help remove these barriers, address workforce shortages in the field, and support access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

“Peer support specialists play an important role in mental health and substance use disorder treatment teams, and provide valuable support to individuals in recovery,” **said Kaine**. “At a time where we need to expand access to mental health care and substance use disorder treatment, this bipartisan legislation is critical to helping peer support specialists enter the field.”

“As millions of Americans struggle to overcome addiction, access to peer support specialists saves lives. This bipartisan bill helps better connect these experts—who have overcome addiction themselves—to those in recovery,” **said Banks.**

“Fifty-two million adults in the U.S.—or 1 in 5 adults—have a mental health condition, and we lack the workforce to help provide much-needed services. The Bipartisan Policy Center has recommended policies advancing peer support specialists and boosting recovery services, and we believe the reintroduction of the PEER Support Act is a critical step toward addressing the shortage of behavioral health workers in this country,” **said Michele Stockwell, President of Bipartisan Policy Center Action.**

“Trained peer supporters make an incredible difference in helping people recover, and this bill positions peer support specialists to be a lifeline throughout the behavioral health care system,” **said Bruce Curser, Executive Director of Mental Health America of Virginia.**

“I’m both excited and incredibly grateful to see the reintroduction of the PEER Support Act, as it highlights the real and significant barriers faced by Peer Recovery Specialists in our communities. For many of us, including myself, entering this workforce can be an unnecessarily difficult challenge after overcoming the obstacles created by our lived experiences with substance use and mental health diagnoses. The PEER Support Act is essential in creating more job opportunities, fostering professional growth, ensuring recognition as equal professionals, and enabling the collection of crucial data that supports this evidence-based practice,” **said Rachel Alderman, AAS, RPRS, CCHW, Community Health Center of the New River Valley (Christiansburg, Virginia).**

“I am more than happy to see advocates stepping up to support Peer Recovery Specialists in this way. Having personally faced barriers in this field due to past charges, I know how discouraging it can be to be turned away from a position despite a commitment to recovery and helping others. I almost gave up, but I am so grateful for the opportunity to prove that a past does not define one’s future. Peer support is built on connection, understanding, and lived experience—showing others that recovery is not only possible but sustainable. This bill is vital to ensuring that those who have walked the path of recovery can continue to uplift and guide others on their own journeys,” **said Kellie Simpkins, CPRS, Community Health Center of the New River Valley (Christiansburg, Virginia).**

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.
  - Provide leadership in the identification of new and emerging issues related to recovery support services.
- 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 provide evidence-based recommendations for overcoming those barriers. Some prospective peer support specialists cannot get a license because of their past interactions with law enforcement related to their substance use disorder (such as convictions for possession of drugs that occurred prior to 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.

The *PEER Support Act* is cosponsored by U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Ron Wyden (D-OR).

The *PEER Support Act* is supported by American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work, American Association on Health and Disability (AAHD), American Association of Suicidality, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), American Psychological Association Services (APA Services), Anxiety & Depression Association of America, Ballad Health, Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC), Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD), Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, Face and Voices of Recovery, Fountain House, International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses, Lakeshore Foundation, Mental Health America (MHA), Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance (MMHLA), NAADAC, the Association for Addiction

Professionals, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), National Association for Peer Supporters (NAPS), National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), National Council for Mental Wellbeing, National Federation of Families, Overdose Prevention Initiative, Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health, Psychotherapy Action Network, RI International, SMART Recovery, and Trust for America's Health (TFAH).

Full text of the *PEER Support Act* is available [here](#).

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