



**Testimony of Victoria Veltri
Office of Health Strategy, Executive Director
Before the Public Health Committee
Concerning SB 859
March 25, 2019**

Good afternoon, Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Anwar, Senator Lesser Representative Young and members of the Public Health Committee. For the record, I am Vicki Veltri, Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy (“OHS”). OHS brings together current state efforts and staff to provide integrated leadership to implement comprehensive, data-driven strategies that promote equal access to high-quality health care, control costs and ensure better health for the people of Connecticut.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments about SB 859, “An Act Concerning Certification for Community Health Workers.” This proposal directs the Department of Public Health (“DPH”), to establish a certification program for community health workers. Positioned in clinics, neighborhoods, homes and workplaces, community health workers complement clinically trained healthcare teams by facilitating access to healthcare, social services and community support. They are uniquely-qualified public outreach professionals who utilize knowledge about the culture, socio-economic needs and available resources in the communities they serve to bridge gaps in healthcare access, enhance care coordination, reduce health disparities and improve health outcomes. Community Health Workers (CHW) have been complementing clinical services in Connecticut for decades, helping healthcare providers to more effectively identify the challenges patients in their community face. It is well accepted that the concept of health includes far more than physical health. To help Connecticut residents be and remain healthy, a

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thoughtful care delivery model must consider not only the standard clinical and quality metrics, but also the impact of social determinants of health on each person's ability to achieve and maintain this goal. CHWs, with their intimate knowledge of the community in which they work, and the challenges unique to the population in that community, fill a crucial place in the care continuum, using this experience to connect the clinical setting to what happens in the person's home, neighborhood and workplace. Comprehensive analysis of the benefit of including CHWs on the care team demonstrates that CHW models in Connecticut enhance access to care, promote consumer education, facilitate disease prevent, and improve health outcomes for populations they serve.

A September 2018 report¹ submitted to the Public Health Committee by OHS' State Innovation Model Community Health Worker Advisory Committee ("CHW Committee") detailed the benefit of developing standardized training and credentialing programs to formalize community health worker qualifications, as well as to increase visibility and recognition of the profession. The CHW Committee also detailed 18 recommendations to facilitate the development of such a program. Certification serves several important functions for the community health worker, as well as Connecticut's health system, by promoting greater understanding of the value the CHW model offers, providing recognition of the excellent work that CHWs already do, boosting the sustainability of the workforce, which is expected to grow and become increasingly valuable to our health systems, and promoting clear, consistent and responsive competency-based training for this workforce. Finally, as care delivery models continue to evolve, developing a certification path for CHWs in Connecticut promotes the fiscal sustainability of these models by boosting workforce retention, facilitating specialization, and providing a path for insurers to reimburse provider practices for these services which, we must remember, help to reduce the overall cost of care.

SB 859 recognizes the importance of developing a mechanism to encourage the growth of this workforce, and tasks the DPH with the development of a CHW certification program. However,

¹ https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OHS/SIM/CHW-Advisory-Committee/CHW_Legislative_Report_2018_Final_20180925.pdf

the CHW Committee, through which OHS and DPH convened key stakeholders across the care delivery spectrum, recently developed detailed recommendations for such a program.

Accordingly, in recognition of these well researched and stakeholder approved recommendations, and in collaboration with DPH, we are developing alternative bill language for your consideration that incorporates the excellent work already done, and that enables DPH to more easily facilitate the implementation of this important initiative.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to deliver OHS's testimony today. If you have any questions concerning my testimony, please feel free to contact me at victoria.veltri@ct.gov.