

The mission of MHASF is to cultivate peer leadership, build community, and advance social justice in mental health.

Good Afternoon Honorable Members.

Thank you for allowing me to present this testimonial to you today. My name is Mark Salazar, and I am the CEO of the Mental Health Association of San Francisco, the operator of the California Peer Run Warm Line. I am also a family member of and advocate for individuals living with mental health and substance use challenges. I am reaching out to you because this service has not yet been included in the FY2023 budget.

The Peer-Run Warm Line is an accessible, non-emergency resource for anyone in California seeking emotional support. Since 2019, our peer counselors have been offering human connection, empathy, and hope to callers throughout the state of California. Through phone and web chat, our peer support warm line has shown its power to prevent crisis and build resilience. I am submitting this testimony to request refunding and expanding the services of the California Peer Run Warm Line. The funding of the California Peer Run Warm Line is set to end on June 30, 2022. This means the end of free and accessible 24/7 mental health service for any Californian experiencing mental and emotional distress. A service that has been accessed and utilized by nearly 48,000 Californians.

MHASF's CA Peer Run Warm Line and our COVID-19 focused CalHOPE Warm Line are essential elements of California's system of crisis care continuum along with the incoming 988 line. Our goal is to address the acute mental health, substance use, and suicide prevention needs of the community and provide high-quality service to *prevent a crisis from escalating* to the point where 988 or 911 is needed. **The California Peer Run Warm Line has experienced a 41% increase in the volume of calls and chats over the last two years.** In 2020, with the COVID-19 emergency declaration in March of 2020, the Warm Line responded to nearly 75,000 contacts and in calendar year 2021 The Warm Line received over 100,000 contacts. We're proud to meet the increasing demand for mental health support as an unprecedented number of Californians are experiencing the mental health impacts of covid 19, political discord, wildfires, and economic stress. We are relieved that those individuals reached out for support, and we prepared our staff to answer the call.

The Warm Line and mental health **experts project an increase in the need of mental health services and MHASF expects a significant increase in demand for the California Peer Run Warm Line service for the coming years.** Now more than ever the state and its unique communities need equitable and far-reaching strategies to reduce mental health risk, outcomes, and access to quality treatment and care. Taking no action to address the forthcoming mental health needs of Californians should not be an option.

As the direct result of COVID-19 and its universal impact on mental health, MHASF is seeking an increase in funding to expand the California Peer Run Warm Line's scope and services. The current funding for the Warm Line was a total of \$10.6 million from 2019 through 2022, averaging \$3.6 million per year. In the 2019/2020 fiscal year, MHASF used \$1.25 million (12%) for start-up costs and infrastructure, in the 2020/2021 fiscal year \$1.9 million (18%) was used to build capacity and meet initial COVID-19 needs, and in the current 2021/2022 fiscal year nearly \$6



The mission of MHASF is to cultivate peer leadership, build community, and advance social justice in mental health.

million (70%) will be used to meet the accelerated demands by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and socio-economic and environmental changes.

To meet the growing need for crisis prevention support and to take on calls during frequent state declared emergencies, MHASF is first requesting an increase in our funding to an average of \$9 million a year from July 2022 to June 2027, including the cost of more peer counselors, operations, and marketing, as well as the expected increase in the cost of doing business and inflation.

Additionally, we recommend that the State support the development and establishment of the California Warm Line Coalition which would create the first Coalition of Warm Lines around the state, complete with training, technical assistance, and support for those Warm Lines which serve smaller communities, people of color, rural areas, and other population-specific needs with unique peer support. The funds needed to achieve an additional goal of establishing this Coalition and expanding quality Warm Line services through standardized training and technical assistance for any community Warm Line in California is under \$11 million over a July 2022 to June 2027.

The State of California has been helping to develop our exemplary Peer Warm Line program for years and supporting the development of many other county and local programs across the state. As President Biden has just officially included both 988 and National Peer Certification in his State of the Union on mental health strategy, funding to form a California Coalition of Warm Lines could help us ensure that our California Peer Run Warm Lines are brought to coalition and firmly seated at the table of national leadership.

I ask that the Assembly continue to prioritize accessible and low-barrier mental health support by funding and expanding the services of the California Peer Run Warm Line from 2022 to 2027 to investment in the long-term mental health of Californians. The increase in funds and linkages to existing resources and services would create the largest peer- supported mental health safety net in the United States.

On the California Peer Run Warm Line, we hire people with their own lived experience of mental health recovery and prepare them to respond to upwards of 200 calls and chats every day. Since 2019 over 48,000 Californians made over 185,000 calls and chats reaching out to the California Peer Run Warm Line, they found meaningful low barrier support from our peer counselors they could count on 24 hours a day, 365 days per year!

We cannot desert 39.5 million Californians and deprive them of a mental health service that has become essential — especially during the pandemic and whatever new challenges lay in store for 2022. No one should be facing their emotional and mental health challenges alone.

Thank you.

Mark Salazar, MHA

President & CEO

Mental Health Association of San Francisco