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Dear Chairperson Hagan McEntee and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Dayna Gladstein, and I am the President and CEO of Newport Mental Health. I am submitting testimony in support of HB8247 and its companion legislation in the Senate SB3099, renaming the “drug court” as the “recovery court.” While this may appear to be a modest change in terminology, it reflects a meaningful and important shift in how our justice system approaches substance use and rehabilitation.

The language we use regarding our communities’ matter, especially in the context of the judicial system. The term “drug court” places emphasis on the offense and the substance, reinforcing a punitive framework. We shift this view by embracing the term “recovery court” and center the goal of the program: helping individuals overcome substance use disorders and rebuild their lives. This change more accurately reflects the purpose and daily work of the court, which is not simply to adjudicate drug-related offenses, but to support long-term recovery.

As a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC), we have a range of substance use programs, from our Intensive out-patient (IOP) to our Integrated Dual Disorder Treatment (IDDT) teams. Recovery courts are built on the understanding that substance use disorder is a complex condition that often underlies criminal behavior. Participants are required to adhere to strict conditions, engage in treatment, and remain accountable to the court, and the proposed name change aligns the language of the law with this rehabilitative mission.

Importantly, this legislation does not alter the eligibility criteria, powers, or responsibilities of the court. It maintains the focus on non-violent offenders who are struggling with addiction. What changes is how the system defines itself, and by extension how participants and the broader community understand its purpose.

Adopting the term “recovery court” may also help reduce stigma. Individuals like the clients we serve entering the program are often at a critical point in their lives. Framing their participation in terms of recovery rather than punishment can encourage engagement and reinforce the expectation of positive change. It also signals to families and communities that the justice system is invested in rehabilitation not just incarceration.

This legislation is a forward-looking update that aligns both with best practices and the modern language surrounding addiction. By renaming the “drug court” as the “recovery court,” it more accurately captures the intent of the program without compromising accountability or public safety.

For those reasons, I urge the committee to support this legislation and its companion bill in the Senate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Dayna Gladstein,
LICSW President & CEO