



American Society of Addiction Medicine
Connecticut Chapter
P.O. Box 88, Hartford, CT 06141

**Testimony in Support of Revised Language
In Raised H. B. 7155**

**An Act Concerning a Professional Assistance Program
for Health Care Professionals**

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and Members of the Committee on Public Health:

My name is Dr. Mark Kraus, past president of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) and currently the chair of Public Policy and Legislative committee. I have recently become an American Society of Addiction Medicine national board member and chair of its Public Policy committee. I also serve as the chair of the Connecticut State Medical Society Committee on Alcohol and Other Drug Dependencies.

My colleagues in the CT Chapter of A.S.A.M. and I have been actively involved in the evaluation, treatment, rehabilitation, and monitoring of impaired health care professionals, including physicians. Our organization stands before you today to support Revised H. B. 7155.

When I was first discussing the concept of a program that would provide for a confidential, alternative to discipline program for health care professionals, my first thought was "It is about time."

I have seen firsthand many nurses, physician assistants, dentists and veterinarians struggling with illness – whether it be substance abuse, mental or physical illness – with no access to an organization that would provide them with the resources to receive a thorough evaluation to diagnose the problem and then enter into a program that would monitor their rehabilitation as well as provide the education needed to help prevent relapse. The revised language of Raised H.B. 7155 provides such a program and allows eligible candidates the confidentiality that encourages health care professionals to access these resources sooner, rather than later. As a practical matter, this means more health care professionals will be proactive about their illness and seek assistance instead of reacting to situations that have already occurred and be mandated to 'get help or face the consequences.'

Patients who come to me in desperation – having hit rock bottom and as a last resort to try to hold onto their license – often state that had there been an opportunity to get the help they needed sooner, they would be in a different situation now.

The revised language in Raised H.B. 7155 provides that opportunity.

As a clinician treating this population, it would be invaluable to have a program that allows an avenue for health care professionals to feel hope for a better life; to not have the additional

worry of recognizing they or their colleagues have a problem, but that to seek help will involve a possible disciplinary action on their license. In these types of situations, it becomes so onerous to 'hold it all together' that once a patient does get caught, there is a sense of relief that the issue is now out in the open and can be dealt with. I want that burden to be lifted at the onset of a problem - the help provided at the beginning of the journey - rather than the desperation of their fingers gripping the ledge and slipping further each day.

While I strongly believe this program is needed and necessary, as a clinician with a responsibility to protecting the public and public safety, I could not support this language without feeling confident that this bill mandates accountability on the part of the health care professional as well as the program. I recognize that every patient will not meet the criteria to participate, and that some will fail to meet the conditions it imposes. The close collaboration with the Department of Public Health will help ensure that those who do participate are monitored in their rehabilitation, maintaining the commitment of the medical community to protect patients from harm at all costs.

I urge you to support the amended language in RHB 7155 and give health care professionals across the state the chance to take their lives back without losing their careers.

Mark Kraus, M.D., FASAM

Connecticut State Medical Society Chair Committee Alcohol and Other Drug Dependencies