

Bill Number 6676: An Act Concerning Licensure of Clinical Social Workers.

My Name is Kathleen O'Mahoney and I am currently a Graduate student at the UCONN School of Social Work. I am here today representing my fellow graduate students as well as the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, NASW.

The Multi-level licensure bill proposed is one of great importance and excitement for Connecticut Social Work students such as myself. This Bill will allow for much change regarding the respect of the social work profession and the people who are committed to the values and ethics that govern the profession here in Connecticut. But, the real importance of this bill lies in its capacity to protect the citizens of Connecticut by ensuring a standard for a licensed social worker. According to this bill, a licensed master's social worker will be a person with training, knowledge, experience, and adherence to a comprehensive code of ethics who will be able to provide high quality services to the citizens of Connecticut.

Social work is a unique profession, in that the degree and the title do not always go hand-in-hand in the workplace. The lack of accountability for those who use the title of 'Social Worker,' representing themselves as members of a trained profession when they are not, is an issue that has gone unmanaged for too many years here in Connecticut. The multi-level licensing bill will give those who are dedicated to the profession and have committed their lives to helping others, the respect of a highly regarded title.

Social work students receive intensive education and training in community organizing, advocacy, capacity-building, systemic change, and evidence-based practice and research. The years of education, training, volunteering, observation, and interning that all social work students partake in, will be worth the effort to myself and other students if one can distinctively separate oneself as a licensed master social worker.

Connecticut is one of only 5 states that do not have multi-level licensing for social workers. 45 other states, including our neighbors New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts all have Master's level social work licensing to accredit and allow only those who have the proper training to operate as social workers.

The prospect of having a certification that separates those who represent themselves as 'social workers' and those who have years of training necessary to earn the title of 'social worker' is extremely meaningful to myself and others in the profession. It is very likely that doing this will lead to expansion of the profession and thereby increasing the number of qualified dedicated social servants in Connecticut. Currently, many of our Connecticut social work students are leaving our state to practice in other states such as New York that have master's level licensing.

Licensing social workers with master's level degrees will show Connecticut residents that you value the work the many trained social workers do tirelessly in your communities, and will also allow for more accountability for professionals and protection for the consumers they serve. Connecticut needs these trained, professional licensed social workers. Providing for a licensing for professional social workers will be incentive to practice in Connecticut.

Please pass this bill and make this the reality for those who have committed their lives to helping others, and who have the necessary, thorough training to be able to do so in evidence-based ways. Passing this bill will directly impact my fellow students and myself who will be graduating with our Master's level social work degrees in May. I am asking you to please take into consideration the great meaning passing this bill will have for us and to the social work profession in Connecticut. And most importantly, the impact this bill will have on the lives of the citizens in Connecticut by ensuring they receive the highest degree of services from only those who are trained to serve them.

Thank you very much for your time.