

RE: Proposed H. B. No. 5893 AN ACT REQUIRING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM OF VOLUNTEER HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS.

Public Safety and Security Committee Members:

My name is Ben Smilowitz, I live in West Hartford, CT and I am the Founder and Executive Director of the Disaster Accountability Project, an organization working to improve the nation's disaster management systems through public accountability, citizen oversight and empowerment, whistle-blower engagement, and policy research. I started the organization after spending three weeks managing Red Cross Client Service Centers in Coastal Mississippi just after Hurricane Katrina.

While the Client Service Center I managed in Gulfport, MS served as many as 1000 households each day, the services we provided were wholly inadequate and many suffered as a result. We witnessed a shortage of relief supplies, few tents for shade, a lack of automation for our casework and check-writing process, and an insufficient number of National Guard members. Altogether, these gaps in services caused much of the unnecessary man-made suffering in the immediate aftermath of the storm.

Also key to the failure of the relief site to address the needs of the Gulfport, Biloxi and surrounding communities at Katrina's ground-zero was that our nurses and medics volunteering through an American Red Cross deployment, all from outside Mississippi, including CA, OH, and ND, felt that their hands were tied because they were unable, in large part because of licensing issues, to provide many of the critical services needed at our site.

This highly skilled group of nurses and medics (many of whom took unpaid leaves from work) were unable to assist with some basic needs that ranged from administering tetanus shots for individuals with infected wounds from rusty nails to IVs for severely

dehydrated individuals. Instead, we had to call ambulances to add more stress to an already over-loaded emergency response system.

House Bill No. 5893 is not a cure-all for the problems that must be fixed by states to prevent future Hurricane Katrina – like problems from reoccurring.

However, resolving these practice licensing issues now and ensuring Connecticut has a long (shovel ready) list of professionals from other states cleared to practice in the state is a good start and an important step in the right direction.

Thank you,

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