

Bill H.B. 5286
**An Act Concerning Licensure of Master and Clinical Social
Workers:**

TESTIMONY

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I am Dr. Lirio K. Negroni, Associate Professor at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. I have been a social work practitioner since 1978 and a graduate social work educator for the last 17 years. It is my hope that these credentials give weight to my testimony. I am here also in representation of the Dean of our School of Social Work, Dr. Salome Raheim. My voice is her voice and the voice of many social work educators in the state of Connecticut. I want to talk about the nature of a master's degree in social work with the purpose of expanding this audience's awareness of the tremendous value of this profession and how competently we prepare our social workers. Although my comments are based on the education provided at UCONN SSW, I can assure this audience that the same educational objectives, standards and quality are present in other MSW programs in Connecticut and nationally.

All social work programs in United States and its territories are sanctioned by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). *CSWE is a nonprofit national association representing over 3,000 individual members as well as 648 graduate and undergraduate programs of professional social work education. It is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the U.S. It promotes and strengthens the quality of social work education. (CSWE Web page)* It is based on their rigorous standards that our social work programs are developed and social work education is delivered.

All masters in social work programs prepare students in the theory, practice and policy of social work. Social work education is comprehensive and combines academic/classroom learning with participation in field placements which allows students to get hand-on experience. It is an education that provides tools for students to support and effect changes that enhance the quality of life of individuals, families, groups and communities.

In Connecticut there are two masters' level programs in social work: the School of Social Work at the University of Connecticut and the Department of Social Work at Southern Connecticut State University. At UCONN SSW we prepare practitioners for advanced social work practice in *casework, group work, community organizing, administration, policy and political action* methods. At Southern students are trained in *advance clinical or management practice* (SCSU SW Web page).

At UCONN SSW we are committed to educate for practice that focuses on the strengths of individuals, families, groups, communities and organizations. This commitment includes helping students develop professional values and ethics, judgment and skills that equip them for life-long

critical analysis of their practice, of social welfare policies and services and society's social, economic and political structures and reflects a state, national and international perspective. Our graduates are prepared to value human diversity, to work against oppression and discrimination, and to prevent and alleviate the effects of violence and poverty, particularly in urban centers. Respect for human rights both locally and globally is also promoted through the School's teaching, scholarship and outreach activities. (UCONN SSW Web page)

In our school students are required to complete 60 graduate credits, 18 of those are in field practicum. Students must complete a total of 1,120 hours of practice in two years under the supervision of field instructors who have a masters degree in social work, two or more years of professional practice experience, demonstrated ability to teach, and respect and commitment to the profession. In order to serve as field supervisors they are required to participate in training that prepares them for this role.

In their practicum students receive a minimum of 1 ½ hours of direct supervision every week plus additional opportunities to learn from other professionals. Students also participate in field seminars and have an assigned academic and field advisor who assists them in maximizing their learning opportunities in class and field. Classroom learning is dependent on field practice learning. Students bring their field learning into the classroom and are encouraged to apply their classroom learning in their field.

Teaching and advising are delivered by competent and experienced faculty members who maintain professional connections with agencies and communities. Educators challenge and encourage students every step of the way, preparing them to go out into the world to make a difference. They help students *to examine their personal biases, honor both differences and commonalities among various political, socio-economic, and ethnic groups, and gain new appreciation for human resilience. (UCONN SSW Web page)*

They assist area service agencies in program development and evaluation, participate in research initiatives of national and international significance, serve on local boards of directors, and collaborate on national advisory committees that help shape social service policies. Combining professional experience and scholarly research, they develop innovative programs and approaches, provide critical insight into the profession, and develop teaching materials that are used widely in social work education. Our methods-based program gives students an opportunity to appreciate the realities of coping with complex human and social problems within the context of specific delivery systems as they directly impact people's lives. This is practice-based learning at its best. It is values in action. (UCONN SSW Web page)

Because of the mission of this profession and the ethical responsibilities that social workers have to those they serve and to their colleagues and the profession itself we support the bill and we advocate for its approval.

Our graduate students engage in a minimum of two years of intensive formation. The MSW is not a degree but a difference in their lives and that of others. But there is a

responsibility that continues after completing graduate education. Social workers abide by the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). Getting and maintaining a license is part of our ethical and professional responsibility and I urge you support that.

Now, today we are asking for another level of licensing. It is important to understand that social work is more than clinical practice and those who will not engage in clinical practice should have the opportunities, rights, privileges and responsibilities embedded in a licensing system. Their licensing conditions should be in accordance with their respective areas of expertise. Connecticut should move in the direction of other states that offer a master level licensing for all social workers.

While many social workers will be working in hospitals, schools, courts, mental health clinics and group homes with individuals and families, others will engage in research, advocacy, policy development, community organizing, administration, program development, and/or political action. Some will work in education and others as elected officials or work in other capacities in government. There are workforces, consumer protection and professionalization issues that merit attention and require a different level of licensing for master level social workers.

On the other hand the requirements for clinical practice must be separate because of the specialized training required at this level. Moreover, clinical practitioners must be trained enough to move into independent practice, therefore, there should be a licensing level that assesses and sanctions those who are well equipped for it.

