

Testimony Before the Public Health Committee

Public Hearing on Monday, March 1, 2010

Subject: H.B. 5286 - An Act Concerning Licensure of Master and Clinical Social Workers

My name is Sarah Petela. I am here today to ask for your support for House Bill #5286, An Act Concerning the Licensure of Social Workers. I want to extend my gratitude to the chairs, Representative Elizabeth Ritter and Senator Jonathan Harris and members of the Public Health Committee. Thanks for granting me the opportunity to discuss my views regarding this bill.

I am here to represent the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and as a Master in Social Work student who will be entering an extremely competitive workforce. I am a first year student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. When I decided to enter into the School of Social Work, I did so to further my professional competencies. I realized that without an MSW degree I would not be able to advance in the human services profession. As a first year student, I am aware of the obstacles to employment my colleagues and I will face upon completion of our degree program. It is disheartening to think of qualified individuals with MSW degrees being turned away from positions within the community because they have not had the ability to fulfill licensure requirements.

The current system of requiring individuals with MSW degrees to complete 3000 hours within their practice field before obtaining their clinical license, discounts the efforts made by social work students throughout their internships. Upon graduation, MSW students have already contributed 1000 hours to helping individuals, families, and communities throughout Connecticut. While interning, students receive approximately 1.5 hours per week of professional supervision, lending to their ability to function as more competent social workers. Passing H.B. 5286 would serve to recognize the contributions made by MSW students and promote a more equitable transition into the workforce.

MSW graduates desiring to work within clinical settings and who wish to provide direct care to vulnerable individuals within society, face a workforce which requires them to have a license before they are able to obtain positions they are qualified for. The current system sets recent MSW graduates up for failure. It is not possible to obtain licensure in Connecticut without work experience. However, getting the work experience has become increasingly difficult as hospitals and other clinical organizations are requiring licensure for social workers they hire. As restrictions regarding the hiring of licensed social workers become more prevalent, the ability of students graduating with MSW's to find gainful employment in their field of choice lessens. These restrictions are causing qualified master level social workers to look outside of Connecticut for employment.

Passing Bill H.B. 5286 will help to ensure that highly qualified and competent workers who wish to serve our most vulnerable individuals will remain in Connecticut instead of seeking more promising job opportunities elsewhere. At present, 45 states have multi-level licensure. These states include New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Lastly, the passage of H.B. 5286 would generate an estimated \$406,000 in its first year and \$187,000 in annual revenue thereafter. Far beyond the monetary value, passage of H.B. 5286 would ensure that individuals who have obtained masters level licensure are held to more stringent standards as they work with individuals, families and communities.

I urge the committee to support HB. 5286 and consider the positive impact it will have on master level social workers across the state. A masters level licensure will serve to keep qualified social workers employed in cities and towns throughout Connecticut.

Thank you for your time.