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**Testimony on H.B. 5286:
AAC Licensure of Master and Clinical Social Workers**

Public Health Committee

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On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Chapter representing over 3400 members, we offer this testimony in support of HB 5286: AAC Licensure of Master and Clinical Social Workers.

HB 5286 expands the current clinical social work licensure statute that has been in effect since 1995. The current law served the social work profession well for many years however changes in the field of social work and the need to expand consumer protections demand that additional licensure levels now be enacted.

The key provisions and reasons for expanding licensure are as follows:

- New MSW graduates seeking to practice clinical social work currently need 3000 hours of post-graduate experience before being licensed. Over the past five years the work environment has changed to the point where employers want licensed social workers. This change is most prominently seen in health care settings however increasingly is found to be the case for a wide range of social work jobs. This leaves our new graduates in a "catch 22". They cannot get the experience without a job and to get the job they need a license. This bill offers an appropriate level of licensure that will open up the job market to recent MSW graduates and keep our graduates in the Connecticut workforce.
- Consumers have an expectation of being protected against unethical practice by health care practitioners. Consumers should also have the right to file a complaint when they allege unethical practice. However, in the case of clinical social work services the consumer does not have a vehicle for filing a regulatory complaint if the practitioner is not yet licensed. HB 5286 provides consumers this very important protection.
- Forty-five states already have multiple levels of licensure, including new MSW graduate licensure. All the contiguous states to CT have new graduate licenses. Because we only have single level licensure our state's graduates are accepting jobs in New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island where they can be licensed. HB 5286 will encourage new graduates to remain in the Connecticut workforce.
- Consumers also have the right to know that the practitioner they are seeing is a properly trained professional. Unfortunately "social worker" is not a protected title in CT so

anyone can be called a social worker. HB 5286 partially addresses this consumer issue by expanding clinical social licensure to all clinical social workers. Consumers will be assured that by seeing a **licensed** social worker that the worker has a Master degree in Social Work and has passed a nationally recognized examination.

- Currently a loophole exists in the clinical social work statute that allows new graduates to immediately go into independent private practice. NASW believes that new graduates should have post graduate experience under professional supervision prior to “putting out a shingle”. HB 5286 closes this loophole by requiring the social worker to attain the highest level of licensure - LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker) prior to entering into independent practice. Again, this is a consumer protection as well as upholding the highest standards of practice.
- HB 5286 is revenue positive. We anticipate that it will bring in an additional \$187,000 in revenue annually and in the first year will generate approximately \$406,000 because of the grandfathering clause. The only cost to the State of Connecticut is administering the licensing program through the Department of Public Health (DPH) and given that this is an expansion of the current licensure program (not a brand new program) DPH will only have to license these social workers anyway within a few years of the social worker’s graduation.
- Unlike last year’s bill where state employees were exempt, HB 5286 covers both the private and public sector, thus the public sector is treated equally.

There are two changes in language that are needed, due to an error in drafting of the language, as follows:

1. Section 4. (a) has the fee for the clinical exam as \$315.00 but it is actually \$314.00.
2. Section 4. (b) left out the deadline for the grandfathering provision. It should read “concerning examinations, on or before October 1, 2012, the commissioner may issue....”. Neither NASW/CT or DPH wants an open ended grandfathering clause.

Expansion of social work licensure will bring Connecticut in line with 45 other states and the District of Columbia that license new MSW graduates. It will assure a qualified social work workforce and offer increased consumer protection. Newly graduated social workers will have an easier time finding work thus be more likely to remain in Connecticut. The State will gain from having a more qualified workforce and by the generation of increased revenue from licensure fees.

NASW/CT urges you to support HB 5286: AAC Licensure of Master and Clinical Social Workers.