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**TESTIMONY RE: Proposed Bill 5587: An Act Concerning Children's Mental Health and
Proposed Bill 169: An Act Concerning the Assessment and Delivery of Mental Health
Services and Interventions for Children**

Select Committee on Children

February 14, 2013

Good day Senator Bartolomeo and Representative Urban and esteemed members of the Select Committee on Children.

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Nurses' Association (CNA) related to Children's Mental Health. I am Mary Jane Williams Ph.D., RN current chairperson of Government Relations Committee for the Connecticut Nurses Association and professor emeritus from Central Connecticut State University. I speak in support of the concepts presented in Proposed Bill 5587 An Act Concerning Children's Mental Health and Proposed Bill No. 169 An Act Concerning the Assessment and Delivery of Mental Health Services and Interventions for Children.

My expertise is in the care of Critically Ill Adults, Education and Curriculum. However as the Chair of GRC, I feel compelled to comment on the two bills being heard today. As a mother with adult children, I also feel compelled to comment. I have worked with a masters prepared Advance Practice Nurse, who also holds a Doctoral degree for over 30 years. Dr. Barile's specialty is Psychiatric Mental Health with a specialty in Child and Adolescents. Over the past 30 years I have watched her teach and practice in her area of expertise. I have also utilized her expertise multiple times. I have witnessed the value of

the specialty in the healthy growth and development of my children. Therefore, I believe it is essential that we as citizens of this state make available resources and services that are essential to the healthy growth and development of our most important resource our children.

In order to support my premise I have used resources from the American Psychological Association and I have attached several position statements from the National Association of School Nurses. The American Nurses Association is in the process of developing recommendations and a position statement related to Children's Mental Health.

Mental health is an essential part of children's overall health. It has a complex interactive relationship with their physical health and their ability to succeed in school, at work and in society. Both physical and mental health affect how we think, feel and act on the inside and outside (APA, 2013).

All children and youth have the right to happy and healthy lives and deserve access to effective care to prevent or treat any social and/or mental health problems that they may develop. However, there is a tremendous amount of unmet need in our state and in our country. Health disparities are particularly pronounced for children and youth living in low-income communities, ethnic minority youth or those with special needs (APA, 2013).

An estimated 15 million of our nation's young people can currently be diagnosed with a mental health disorder. Many more are at risk of developing a disorder due to risk factors in their biology or genetics; within their families, schools, and communities; and among their peers. There is a great need for mental health professionals to provide the best available care based on scientific evidence, good clinical expertise, and that takes into account the unique characteristics of the child or adolescent. However, it is

estimated that only about 7 percent of these youth who need services receive appropriate help from mental health professionals (Dept of Health and Human Services, 2001, Surgeon Generals A Call for Action).

Research in psychology has contributed to the development of more effective treatment and prevention of mental health disorders in children, youth, and families, including programs targeting expectant mothers, children in school settings, and youth transitioning into adulthood. Other issues related to Mental Health include ones Identity, Emotional, Social, Cognitive and Biological bases. Culture, ethnicity and language also affect's the behavior of children and adolescents in numerous ways and as a result affects the methods of prevention and treatment of mental health disorders (APA, 2013).

Mental Health providers have developed tools to assess the risk and protective factors for the mental health of children and youth, to test them for behavioral or emotional problems, and to continually monitor treatment progress (APA, 2013).

Summary

The screening, diagnosis, treatment, management of mental health services can be provided by a team of qualified providers inclusive of Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, Social Workers, and School Nurses to cite a few.

We must also educate individuals who interact with children daily in our schools and daycare settings, the knowledge to recognize issues and the tools essential to referral. It is essential that we as a state provide access to providers, adequate reimbursement for all providers and when necessary in house treatment, in facilities in the state of Connecticut. I urge you to support changes that will provide adequate mental health services for the children of Connecticut.

Thank you for your time. We strongly urge the committee to vote favorably to support of the concepts presented in these proposed bills.

Thank you

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