

Public Hearing March 8, 2013

To: The Public Health Committee
Sen. Terry B. Gerratana, Chair
Sen. Gayle S. Slossberg, Vice Chair

From: Miranda Jones
Southern Connecticut State University
765-D Mix Ave. Hamden, CT 06514

Re: Proposed S.B. No. 374: AN ACT REQUIRING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
ASSESSMENTS FOR CHILDREN

In Opposition

I am a social work student at Southern Connecticut State University, and I ask that you please vote against Proposed Bill 374, which would require behavioral mental health assessments for children in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12 without any indication that they were needed. These evaluations risk misdiagnosing a child at too young of an age, as most mental illnesses are not diagnosable until later in life, between the ages of 15 and 30. These evaluations would also constitute an unwarranted and unnecessary invasion of family privacy.

Diagnosing children is extremely difficult and different than adults. To properly diagnose a child, one must involve the parents. The information and history of parents and extended family is paramount to the diagnosis of a child. Other factors that must be considered in the diagnosis of a child include long term documentation of teachers and others who have direct and regular exposure to the child. In summary, it is impossible to constitute any type of reliable assessment or diagnosis based on one sitting with a child or teen every 2 years unless there is extensive specialized training and the health care professional is able to work within the family setting with a complete history.

In addition, it is important to consider the affordability of programs, families and health insurance coverage for a child's mental health diagnosis. According to a 2010 study by LeaAnne DeRigne on the parent-reported reasons for unmet mental health care needs in children, many families struggle to provide the proper care for children in need of mental health care due to lack of insurance or a lack of insurance that covers mental health care costs. Many private health care insurance types do not cover a lot of the costs, putting families in a very difficult position. The state must analyze how they plan to implement these programs, who they would hire, and who would pay? Once a child is diagnosed or recommended to receive mental health care, will financial benefits be provided for families who need to find ways to cover these costs? What programs will be made available, etc?

The consequences and outcomes of passing this bill would cause more devastation than passing this bill alone. The mental health care systems as well as health insurance companies need to be evaluated and improvement before we even consider mandating mental health assessments for our children.

Thank you for this opportunity and your consideration.