

To Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and Members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 6391 – an act to remove the regulatory requirement of a mandatory collaborative practice agreement signed by a physician in order for an APRN to engage in the provision of advanced practice nursing.

My name is Diane DeCillis Johnston and I am a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner. I graduated from Columbia University School of Nursing in 1997 and I have been practicing since that time. I have had post graduate education in Family Therapy as well as Fellowship training in Pain and Palliative Care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. I have also had extensive training in the field of Mind Body Medicine at the Department of Behavioral Medicine at Harvard University as well as with other pioneers in the field. I have taught a course in Family Theory to graduate students at Columbia for several years and I have been employed as well in major teaching hospitals where I performed evaluations, assessments and prescribed for patients who suffered from psychiatric disorders. I am confident in my abilities as a nurse practitioner and I have a competency in both psychotherapy for adults and adolescents and psychopharmacologic management.

I am expressing my deep concern about the inability of advanced practice nurses to prescribe with autonomy in the state of Connecticut. As you well know, this is not the case in several states where advanced practice nurses do not need to have a mandatory collaborative practice with a physician.

It has been my experience that most physicians do not want to provide a collaborative experience for an APRN. It has also been my experience that it is very difficult to find a psychiatrist who is willing to do this. Therefore, the APRN is forced not to prescribe for patients if he/she cannot find a collaborative arrangement. Advanced practice nurses make a significant contribution in the health care field and in the field of mental health. President Obama, in his health care reform efforts, has applauded the work of nurse practitioners. Yet, in Connecticut, psychiatric APRNs are not allowed to practice in the way they were taught and trained.

Overwhelmingly, patients choose to work with an APRN because the education and approach of an APRN is a holistic one where the patient is treated from a perspective of health and preventative are rather than from a narrow perspective of disease and illness.

As a mental health professional with 16 years of experience as a Nurse Practitioner and 30 years of experience in the medical field, I ask you to strongly consider removing the mandatory collaborative practice agreement. Connecticut needs to move forward and provide its dedicated, well educated advanced practice nurses to practice with autonomy. It should not be necessary to leave the state in order to function as valued mental health professionals.

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