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Testimony on H.B. 6391: AAC The Practice of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses
Public Health Committee
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Submitted by: Stephen Karp, MSW

The National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter, representing over 3200 social workers throughout Connecticut, supports AAC The Practice of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses.

APRNs offer cost effective and quality health care services to the residents of our state. Of particular interest to NASW/CT is the access and delivery of mental health services. We estimate that two-thirds of all mental health services in Connecticut are provided by clinical social workers. These social workers provide services both within agency practices and private practice. In both settings we see an important role for the APRN that includes medication management. This bill will provide APRNs with the ability to practice fully independently and as such will increase the providers our members can consult with and collaborate with when the social worker's client is on a psychotropic medication.

There is a lack of sufficient psychiatrists and especially child and adolescent psychiatrists within Connecticut. This has made it difficult for individuals to access needed mental health services when medication management is necessary. Likewise, social service agencies often find it difficult to attain sufficient hours of consultation with a psychiatrist for their clients who are in need of medication management. This bill will significantly increase the accessibility of qualified providers who can provide consultation, oversight and direct care of individuals in need of mental health and physical health care.

Just as clinical social workers frequently work in collaboration with a psychiatrist seeking consultation when the social worker deems it necessary, we can expect that an APRN will do the same when appropriate. As professionals APRNs can be counted on to seek consultation when they need additional assistance however they should not be required to practice under physician consultation when not all cases need this added level of scrutiny. This bill recognizes the ability of an APRN to practice independently and by doing so will expand access to health care in a cost effective manner.

Our members who work with APRNs consistently report on the positive relationship they have and on the quality of services the APRN provides. This feedback from our members was an important factor in NASW/CT offering our support for H.B. 6391.

APRNs must complete a rigorous training regimen to earn the APRN. At a time when the Affordable Care Act is looking to expand healthcare access and services our state needs to be looking at how to assure that we have an adequate number of providers to offer that care. By removing the requirement that an APRN practice under a formal collaboration agreement with a physician is a sensible step toward expansion of health care services. It is also a recognition of the qualifications of APRNs and the changing health care landscape that demands better ways of providing care.

