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PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE TESTIMONY
MARCH 20, 2013

Catholic Charities, Inc. – Archdiocese of Hartford
In Support of
H.B. No. 6594 (RAISED) - AN ACT CONCERNING RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES AND DEFINITIONS OF "NURSING HOME FACILITY" AND "MEDICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE"

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and esteemed members of the Public Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of Section 40 of Raised Bill 6594, An Act Concerning Residential Care Homes and Definitions of "Nursing Home Facility" and "Medical Review Committee."

Catholic Charities, Inc. - Archdiocese of Hartford is a non-profit agency serving people of all faiths in Hartford, Litchfield, and New Haven Counties since 1920. It administers more than twenty-nine programs from forty-one locations, assisting over thirty thousand families annually. Within its wide range of programs, Catholic Charities provides counseling, mental health services and substance abuse treatment to individuals, couples and families of all ages. Catholic Charities has numerous offices, staffed by licensed health care professionals, that are licensed by the Department of Public Health to provide mental health (11 psychiatric outpatient clinics) and substance abuse services (9). During fiscal year 2011-2012, Catholic Charities provided behavioral health counseling to approximately 10,570 clients.

Catholic Charities supports Section 40 of this bill defining "medical review committee," in section 19a-17b of the Connecticut General Statutes, to include a committee of any health care provider established pursuant to written bylaws for the reason that it provides licensed organizations, such as Catholic Charities, with the authority to create committees for the purpose of engaging in peer review, and further, that the actions of such committees will be protected by the statutory immunity provisions. The statute currently defines "medical review committee" as applying to a committee of any health care institution; however this term "health care institution" is not defined in the statute.

The term health care provider, in contrast, is defined within the statute and therefore the change in language from health care institution to health care provider supplies a necessary clarification in the scope of the statute's coverage. Catholic Charities supports the proposed change in the definition of medical review committee to include committees established by licensed health care

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providers as it corrects the ambiguity in the current language and will act to further improvements in patient care.

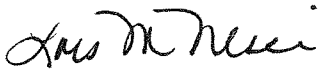
The medical profession developed peer review as a means to evaluate and improve the quality of health care, and it has become the principal method of evaluating the quality of patient care. Peer review committees provide an efficient method of self-regulation. The process ensures the standardization of the most effective and appropriate medical procedures at a minimal administrative cost. Further, the peer review system serves the interest of public health by effectively policing the procedures and health care providers that may pose a risk to patients. Peer review therefore serves an important public policy role for health care.

Critical to the peer review process is the confidentiality afforded to a medical review committee's investigation. Peer review confidentiality is rooted in public policy to support health care professionals in their self-regulatory efforts to monitor the competency and conduct of their peers. The immunities provided in the peer review statute are necessary to encourage individuals to speak freely about past events and share their thoughts on future improvements or safeguards to enhance patient care. Protections for peer reviews conducted by medical review committees established by health care providers are essential to ensuring high standards for care, resulting in better treatment and better outcomes for patients.

Peer reviews are vital to identifying weaknesses and continually improving the administration of health care. The legislation under consideration, affirmatively establishing the ability of health care providers to create statutory medical review committees, is a necessary step in ensuring quality health care for people of all races and economic backgrounds.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important public health issue.

Respectfully submitted,



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