



Testimony in Support of *Proposed Bill No. 366*  
*AN ACT REQUIRING LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS AND COUNSELORS TO COMPLETE CONTINUING*  
*EDUCATION COURSEWORK IN CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS.*

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Connecticut residents continue to experience disparities in health outcomes in addition to inequities in the quality of healthcare service delivery. Many racial and ethnic minority patients who present for healthcare including mental health are not receiving appropriate services by providers due to a lack of cultural awareness and culturally competent care and treatment. There is widespread documentation of disparities in health care and behavioral health care, with certain racial and ethnic groups experiencing lower quality of care, even when controlling for income, education level and insurance status. Experts have concluded that stereotyping and bias on the part of providers are most likely at least part of the problem, and have recommended cultural competence training as a needed solution.

Bill No. 366, *AN ACT REQUIRING LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS AND COUNSELORS TO COMPLETE CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSEWORK IN CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS*, is an expansion of current legislation that mandates the completion of a minimum level of cultural competence training by medical doctors and psychiatrists. This legislation will mandate the completion of training by social workers, professional counselors, alcohol and drug counselors and marital and family therapists. This is critical to ensure that racial and ethnic minorities and linguistically diverse populations receive adequate behavioral health services and for reducing existing cultural barriers among diverse populations in seeking behavioral health care. This legislation represents one important step towards eliminating health care disparities.

Bill No. 366, *AN ACT REQUIRING LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS AND COUNSELORS TO COMPLETE CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSEWORK IN CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS* is based on multiple recommendations made by national experts on health care disparities including the Office of Minority Health which acknowledges that cultural competence training be provided as a strategy to eliminate stereotyping and bias among providers in health care settings. This policy supports health equity by requiring a recommended strategy that would help to eliminate barriers to quality health care experienced by racial and ethnic minorities due to stereotyping and bias.

Connecticut has great need for behavioral health services among vulnerable populations that are adequate, appropriate, and accessible. Evidence demonstrates that certain sub-populations in Connecticut have poorer health outcomes including mental health than the population at large. These groups experience reduced access to culturally competent and coordinated services, often resulting in lower quality or delayed behavioral health care and treatment. Racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities are particularly vulnerable, as are other groups that experience social and or economic disadvantages, such as immigrants, people with disabilities, and homeless populations.

Bill No. 366, *AN ACT REQUIRING LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS AND COUNSELORS TO COMPLETE CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSEWORK IN CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS* proposes to heighten the quality of behavioral health care services through increased cultural competence training for behavioral health professionals in Connecticut. Improved cultural competency training of behavioral health professionals for diverse populations will help to strengthen the health care system. Disparities along racial and ethnic lines affect both health status and access to essential care. In the facilitation of mental health care workforce training to promote cultural and linguistic competence, Bill No. 366, *AN ACT REQUIRING LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS AND COUNSELORS TO COMPLETE CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSEWORK IN CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS* will further serve the state's diverse populations.

By working to improve the behavioral health care system to ensure cultural competency standards are in place, Bill No. 366, *AN ACT REQUIRING LICENSED SOCIAL WORKERS AND COUNSELORS TO COMPLETE CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSEWORK IN CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS* will help to eliminate health

disparities by race, ethnicity, gender and linguistic ability thereby improving the health for all of Connecticut's residents.