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Testimony on HB 5535: AAC Notice of a Patient's Observation Status and Notice Concerning the  
Qualifications of Those Who Provide Health Care and Counseling Services

Public Health Committee  
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Submitted By: Stephen A. Karp, MSW

The National Association of Social Workers, CT chapter supports Section 2 of HB 5535. It is important that consumers be fully informed as to the qualifications, including license and certification, of the mental health practitioner providing counseling services to them.

In Connecticut the provision of mental health services is not strongly regulated. There are the six professions that are licensed or certified by DPH: Social Work, Psychiatry, Psychology, Marital and Family Therapy, Professional Counselors and Alcohol & Drug Counselors. Individuals being treated by a practitioner of one of these licensed or certified professions can be assured the practitioner has a license or certification and that the consumer may file a complaint with DPH if they believe practice standards were not maintained in the treatment.

There are individuals however who offer counseling services without a state license or certification, thus the consumer cannot seek redress through DPH and the consumer may not be receiving proper treatment as the provider may not have a qualified certification or degree. The reason for this is that "Psychotherapist" is not a protected title in Connecticut. Anyone can hold themselves out as a psychotherapist as long as they do not claim to be a licensed practitioner when they are not. Consumers can wrongfully assume that they are seeing a master or doctoral trained mental health provider whose degree is actually in a mental health field. HB 5535 addresses this issue by making sure that the consumer is informed as to the professional's qualifications, license and certifications or lack thereof.

HB 5535 also makes sure that the consumer is aware of the qualifications of the staff that will be involved in counseling them. This is an important point as a consumer may go to a licensed provider's practice but be treated by an employee of the licensed practitioner that may not be as qualified. Again, consumers need to be fully informed of such matters.

We urge the Public Health Committee to pass this consumer friendly provision that will assure consumers are fully informed as to the qualifications, level of training, and expertise that their mental health provider has attained.