

March 14, 2014

To: Connecticut Public Health Committee

My name is Linda Steinmark. I live in Burlington, Connecticut, and I am a certified genetic counselor. I am here to support Raised Bill SB No. 437: An act concerning licensure for genetic counselors.

In the course of my practice, I have seen the impact genetic counseling has had for patients and their families facing a significant history of cancer. While genetic testing can empower patients to take control of their risks, it is often a difficult decision to undergo testing. We counsel individuals who have been caretakers for relatives on the difficult journey a cancer diagnosis brings. We have patients already diagnosed with one cancer concerned about their risk of developing other types of cancer. Often, the decision to proceed with testing is not as straightforward as it may appear. Counseling and supported decision-making are an integral part of the services we provide.

Since we began our hereditary cancer counseling program in 2009, we have experienced nothing but positive regard from physicians and other co-workers. We are seen as an integral partner on the cancer care teams at the four hospitals where we provide services. The physicians we work with understand that the provision of genetic counseling and interpretation of genetic test results is complex. We also work collaboratively with nurse practitioners and physician assistants who have historically provided genetic testing for their patients. Our seeking licensure is in no way to be interpreted as seeking to limit their scope of practice. Rather, our approach has been to develop close relationships and provide genetics education, resulting in the best team care for our patients.

As many genetic counselors can attest, while infrequent, there are cases where a well-intentioned provider who is not a genetic counselor has ordered either unnecessary tests or the wrong test, or has misinterpreted the sometimes complex test reports. When genetic counselors become licensed, Connecticut state residents can be confident that they are receiving the best, most appropriate care.

I believe that the language of SB No. 437 addresses the concerns of Connecticut-based genetic counselors and the Department of Public Health. There are a few areas of the bill that we would wish to clarify. I would be happy to provide further information about the practice of genetic counseling and our national accreditation process to the legislative lawyers involved in authoring this bill.

Thank you for your allowing me this time to address the Public Health Committee and express my support for SB No. 437.

Sincerely,

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