

Haggerty, Katie

From: Wendy Levy <wlevyma@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 09, 2015 12:22 AM
To: JudTestimony
Subject: Opposition to Bill 5505

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am writing in opposition to Committee Bill Number 5505. I am a clinical and forensic psychologist in practice for almost 20 years. I see patients for psychotherapy, and conduct psychological evaluations of adults and children in criminal as well as juvenile matters. I do not perform evaluations for Family Court. However, I am writing to express my growing concern over the misinformation that has been occurring as of late in Family Court, which may have serious repercussions, if enacted.

I believe that psychologists, of all the helping/medical professions, have some of the highest ethical standards, particularly regarding boundaries and objectivity. Our APA Ethics Code dictate that we practice only in our fields of expertise, avoid dual relationships, and maintain objectivity. These three basic principles are being severely threatened by Bill 5505. Forensic psychologists have years of expert training (psychological testing, diagnostic skills, mental health experience, etc), in their respective areas of practice; opening up evaluations to untrained clinicians would be a disservice to the families in question. Just as a general practitioner would not perform surgery on his/her patient, so too a minimally therapist would be unable to conduct a forensic psychological evaluation.

Bill 5505 condones dual-relationships, ie, blurring the lines between an evaluator and therapist. It suggests the person's therapist can also perform his/her evaluation. Psychological evaluations are by definition, objective and neutral. It must be noted, that there is a distinct difference between a therapeutic relationship, and a psychological evaluation. In the former, the psychologist becomes more subjective, as he/she enters a relationship with the client. By the very nature of "relationship," the therapist is more subjective, and becomes an advocate for the client. In contrast, for an evaluation to be effective, the evaluator strives for objectivity. No therapy occurs during a short time-limited evaluation; it is a process of information gathering, presented to the Court. Should a mental health professional conduct both therapy and an evaluation, there would be no objectivity.

Bill 5505 also proposes that parents choose different evaluators for each family member. Once again, the evaluation is no longer objective, as the evaluator only has limited information, based on one individual. The family system as a whole is not considered, severely truncating the process, and yielding confusing results and recommendations.

For these reasons, above, I do not support Bill 5505, and ask that the Judiciary Committee reconsider the Bill, and see how it will negatively impact not only the Connecticut Family Court system, but the very children it purports to protect.

Thank you for your consideration,

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