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TESTIMONY RE: **PROPOSED BILL NO. 5912 AN ACT CONCERNING TRAINING IN MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES PERSONNEL**

PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

MARCH 4, 2015,

Good Morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and esteemed members of the Public Health Committee

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Nurses' Association (CNA) related to: **PROPOSED BILL NO. 5912 AN ACT CONCERNING TRAINING IN MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES PERSONNEL**

I am Mary Jane Williams Ph.D., RN current chairperson of Government Relations Committee for the Connecticut Nurses Association and professor emeritus from Central Connecticut State University.

I speak in strong support of: **PROPOSED BILL NO. 5912 AN ACT CONCERNING TRAINING IN MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES PERSONNEL**

The Issue is related to the increasing occurrence of mental health problems in our communities. Individuals with mental health problems often face negative attitudes and discrimination. Many people are not well informed about mental health problems and professional help is not always on hand. It is common to

find individuals who do not know how to respond to a mental health emergency and for a variety of reasons individuals with Mental Health Problems do not seek treatment.

What Is Mental Health First Aid? Mental Health First Aid is offered in the form of an 8-12 hour interactive course that presents an overview of mental illnesses and substance use disorders in the U.S. and introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems, builds understanding of their impact, and overviews common treatments. Those who take the course to certify as Mental Health First Aiders learn a 5-step action plan encompassing the skills, resources and knowledge to help an individual in crisis connect with appropriate professional, peer, social, and self-help care. A 5-day instructor certification program is also offered to expand the base of educators in this important area. To date, Mental Health First Aid has been replicated in more than 20 countries, including: England, Scotland, Finland, Canada, Cambodia, China, Ireland, Wales and Singapore.<sup>6</sup> In the U.S., we value the supporting evidence and strive to achieve fidelity to the original Mental Health First Aid program developed in Australia. Our goal over the next decade is to make Mental Health First Aid in the U.S. as common as CPR and First Aid training. Why Mental Health First Aid? The Mental Health First Aid curriculum is unique in that it is aimed at nonprofessional audiences and specifically seeks to aid in reducing social distance, increasing help-seeking and helping behaviors and providing strategies to assist an individual in crisis. (National Council on Community Behavioral Health Care, 2013)

It is essential that our Emergency personnel be educated in the aforementioned manner. They are usually the first on the scene and an educated provider can de-escalate a situation and provide for a safe outcome. I have attached a copy of the MHFA Legislative Toolkit for your review.

I therefore urge you to support: **PROPOSED BILL NO. 5912 AN ACT CONCERNING TRAINING IN MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES PERSONNEL.** Thank you for your attention to this proposed legislation and for your commitment to the Health of the public we all serve.

Mary Jane M. Williams PhD, RN, Chair Government Relations, Connecticut Nurses Association, Professor Emeritus, Central Connecticut State University

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