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February 16, 2015

Dear Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and Members of the Public Health Committee

I am writing to you concerning Representative Srinivasan's bill, HB6267, which in my opinion poses the risk of having the exact opposite effect of what it purports to accomplish. In the absence of any text accompanying the bill, this letter addresses a seemingly related petition circulated by his constituent, Hector Morera. While on the surface, the reasoning behind the bill seems to seek objectivity, in my opinion it injects hostile bias and misrepresentations of the current state of the Connecticut Family Court system in a sensational and illogical manner.

I am not addressing comments about the internal workings of DPH, as I have very little knowledge of this process. I imagine that representatives of DPH will be able to best address any imputed inadequacies. However, it is not my impression, based on my limited experience with DPH, that this Department is slow to respond to complaints in general or lacking in any diligence in investigating concerns that show merit.

For most of my career I have conducted forensic evaluations in a child protection context for the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters. Over the past ten years or so, I have become increasingly involved in conducting evaluations in Family Court matters.

In this context, my experience is that there is a small subset of divorcing parents who are incapable of resolving personal conflicts in a way that will minimize adverse consequences for their children. The disputes that are the most acrimonious and marked by parental discord are those that involve access to and custody of children.

Typically, psychologists are not asked to become involved in cases where parents are able to resolve these conflicts. We are called in to assess situations in which there are allegations and counter-allegations of mental illness, domestic violence, and other deleterious parental behaviors.

The argument that investigation of a forensic psychologist by another forensic psychologist is not objective does not comport with my experience. I am joined by psychologists today who have critiqued my work, including offering expert testimony in legal proceedings. I have also offered expert testimony concerning the work of psychologists who work in the same field. I can assure you that if a complaint is filed against one of us, and we know a colleague will be reviewing our work, this knowledge does little to alleviate the distress the process engenders. To the contrary, the standards for work in this field are so rigorous, and the work so challenging, that such a review is inevitably an anxiety-provoking process.

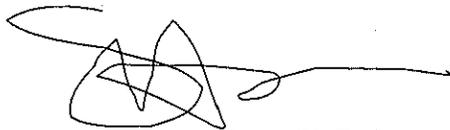
Perhaps most egregious is the assertion that mental health professionals conducting forensic evaluations in the Family Court “routinely did not follow industry standards.” As psychologists in this field we are ever-mindful of the potential repercussions for sub-standard work. Our reports come under scrutiny from attorneys, judges, and other psychologists. Our opinions are often the matter of public record. Because of the intense and strife-laden litigious context, I and my colleagues take great care to craft reports that are clear, objective, and most of all focused on the best interests of the children whose welfare is often dependent on such diligence.

It is this very principle – conducting evaluations in terms of the interest of children – that is the reason (in my opinion) this task force is being proposed. I can only infer that a common thread among those calling for such a task force is disagreement with the opinions of objective professionals who were attempting to offer the Court a product that would minimize harm and maximize long-term benefit to children. The notion that a mental health professional would somehow compromise his or her integrity and professional livelihood to engage in some form of conspiracy or collusion is inconsistent with everything I have observed in my twenty years of working with the courts in Connecticut.

I am intrigued by the statement in the petition that appears to equate “unethical behavior” with the decision to undertake forensic work. That is, that some professionals avoid working in the court system to “avoid being placed in a position where their impartiality may be compromised.”

To the contrary, a forensic psychologist enjoys the benefit of being apart from the fray in these legal battles. He or she is able to offer conclusions and opinions that are independent of the litigant’s positions or influence, and therefore can focus on the welfare of the child(ren). My concern is that by validating the efforts of clearly vindictive, angry litigants by the creation of a forum for further airing these misguided claims, the integrity of the process will be undermined the work of dedicated mental health professionals will be eviscerated. As a result, children who might have benefited from the work of these professionals will suffer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen M. Humphrey". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "S" and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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