



 an affiliate of the
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

TESTIMONY OF

The Connecticut Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

SUBMITTED TO THE

PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

Wednesday, March 4, 2015

HB 5896, an Act Establishing A Nutrition Education Advisory Council

Good afternoon and thank you to Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and the members of the Public Health Committee for the opportunity to speak on the language we would like to attach to *HB 6987, An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Public Health Statutes*, which we have submitted for your consideration. I am Jessica Delvecchio, registered dietitian-nutritionist and certified dietitian-nutritionist. I also serve as the chair of the legislative committee for the Connecticut Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Today, I am representing the Connecticut Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and we are seeking to change the current language in the Practice Act for Dietitian-Nutritionists (Chapter 384b of Connecticut statute). Our proposed changes reflect rule changes made by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services regarding the practice of Registered Dietitian-Nutritionists (RDN) and other nutrition practitioners qualified to maintain CD-N certification that went into effect in July 2014 (42 CFR 482.28).

This minor or technical change to the practice act would align our state statute with federal law. Testimony from the Connecticut Hospital Association supports this change and provides suggested language to HB 6987. Hospitals would then have the ability to implement this change and realize the savings associated with the CMS rule change. CMS estimates that individual hospitals would on average save a minimum of \$124,853 per year and that this rule will save \$459 million dollars annually in healthcare costs across the country.

Although money talks, we believe that the change will also improve patient care and satisfaction, and save our medical providers time and resources that can be redirect towards direct patient care.

In 1996, Connecticut implemented certification for qualified nutrition professionals, which provides scope of practice and title protection for those individuals who meet the rigorous standards set forth in the practice act. The CD-N credential identifies an individual who meets these criteria, and maintains their certification through the Department of Public Health. Prior to the CMS rule change finalized last July, dietitians were only allowed to write verbal diet orders, which had to be approved and co-signed by a physician, nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant. The rule change by CMS acknowledges that registered dietitian-nutritionists and other qualified nutrition professionals are an important part of a patient's interdisciplinary team, and are best qualified to assess the nutritional status of patients, as well as to design and

implement nutrition treatment plans. This resulted in the elimination of the need to have the dietitian-nutritionist supervised by a practitioner to place or modify therapeutic diet orders.

Because of their comprehensive training and qualifications, CD-Ns practicing in hospitals are uniquely positioned to be advocates for their patients. They help prevent malnutrition, reduce length of stay, and ultimately lower healthcare costs. CMS states that without this change, “hospitals would not be able to effectively realize improved patient outcomes and overall cost savings that we believe would be possible with such changes.”

The Connecticut Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the state affiliate of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and represents the interests of registered dietitian-nutritionists in Connecticut. There are currently over 2,000 registered dietitian-nutritionists practicing in our state; working in a variety of settings. Registered Dietitian-Nutritionists otherwise referred to as RDs or RD-Ns, make up the majority of nutrition providers practicing under the CD-N certification in the state.

We are hopeful you will agree with us that our proposed modification of the current CD-N scope of practice will result in significant improvements in the care of hospitalized patients in our state, and ask for your support in attaching our revisions to HB 6987 to align our state with the updated CMS rule.