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To the honored members of the judiciary committee:

My name is Dr. Stephanie Leite. I am a forensic psychologist practicing in the state of CT. I am the president of the Connecticut Psychological Association's Forensic Division, the Vice President of the New England chapter of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals and the founder and president of Forensic Intelligence, LLC. I have worked in the family courts for approximately 10 years and have completed hundreds of family psychological evaluations.

I am writing in opposition to House Bill 5505. I am limiting my testimony to those portions of the bill that fall within the realm of my expertise, which is the area of psychology and custody evaluations (section three). The bill contains many sections that impact other professionals working in the family court.

Much of this bill contains ideas that seem, on the surface to be good ideas. Indeed, there are some good ideas in the bill, but they are overwhelmed by vague language and misinformation.

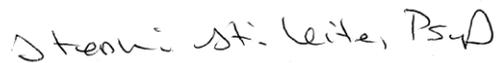
Section three of the proposed bill discusses therapists and evaluators. It is important to understand these are two different roles. A therapist can work with one party or be a co-parenting therapist or a family therapist. A custody evaluator is something entirely different. Often, parents wish to have their therapist submit a letter to the court saying they are a good parent in an effort to save money and use a professional they trust. However, the role of a custody evaluator must be filled by a neutral. An individual therapist who submits a letter to the court recommending custody not only acts unwisely, but also against the APA ethics code and the guidelines set for by the AFCC. It is necessary that an appropriately trained custody evaluator be used, and this bill seems to ignore the value of such an expertise.

Additionally, it is currently the practice of the courts in which I have appeared that the parties do choose their evaluators and therapists. There are times when the court may suggest a list, but the parties are usually able to choose. Just as it is important to have a qualified evaluator, it is important to have a qualified therapist. Problems arise when the parties wish to have poorly qualified individuals as their therapists. For example, I recently evaluated a woman who had a serious trauma and substance abuse history. She needed to be in cognitive behavioral treatment with someone who understood issues of trauma, domestic violence and substance use. Instead, she chose to go to an unlicensed domestic violence counselor who provided needed moral support, but did not have the skills to create therapeutic

change. Because someone who meets criteria for a psychiatric diagnosis may not understand the scope of their illness, they may also be unable to see need for change or the way their functioning affects their children. They then may advocate for inappropriate and useless therapists. The courts must have the power to ask in the best interest of the child.

Finally, the suggestion that evaluations be sent to the court within 30 days of completion is an interesting one. It is vital the evaluations are completed as soon as possible. However, the courts will not currently accept them. Instead, they are sent to the GALs and the attorneys who, submit them as evidence as part of the legal proceedings. Therefore, this suggestion does not fit into the legal framework of an evidentiary process. Additionally, placing an evaluation in the court record makes it public information, which runs counter to the necessary confidentiality of this information. If a psychological evaluation is simply in a file, anyone could come in and copy it and put sensitive and damaging information on the internet or disseminate it in other ways damaging to the parties and, most importantly, the children.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Stein Leite, Psy.D." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Stephanie Stein Leite, Psy.D.