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Senator Gerratana and Members of the Public Health Committee:

I am a licensed psychologist in Connecticut and my primary work is in psychological assessment. I have been conducting forensic psychological evaluations primarily for the Juvenile Court in Connecticut for the past 20 years. I have also provided volunteer mediation services to couples involved in the Family Court, as well as therapy for children and parents involved in court procedures. I regularly meet with other forensic psychologists, as well as other mental health providers, for peer supervision and sharing of clinical information.

In my experience, the psychologists who choose to provide custody evaluations for the courts are highly skilled professionals who have participated in extensive training in order to provide the highest quality services possible to the families and the court. In order to do so, psychologists adhere strictly to the professional guidelines issued by the American Psychological Association and other professional organizations. With each evaluation that is undertaken, the task of the evaluator is to engage with the parents, many of whom are angry at having to participate at all, and to form enough of a working rapport to be able to come to a good understanding of the individual's capacities and strengths, as well as their needs or weaknesses. Evaluators also meet with the children, see the parents and children together to assess their relationships and attachment, and speak with others who are able to provide additional insight into the family functioning. The evaluator then takes all of this information to try to craft the best possible recommendations for what is in the best interests of the children and can best support optimal family functioning.

The vast majority of families is able to work out any custody arrangements and other important decisions for their children without the need for court intervention. The small percentage of families who are unable to do so are more likely than most to be conflictual parents who find it difficult to reach compromises with each other. Though they love their children and want to provide the best possible family life for them, they are often blinded by their own anger and hurt, making it hard for them to accept either their own limitations or the other parent's virtues. Divorce, even for the most emotionally stable and well-adjusted individuals, is an incredibly painful and potentially destabilizing experience. Parents are trying to cope with their desires and worries for their children at the same time as they are trying to deal with their feelings of sadness, betrayal, and fears for the uncertainties of their future. It is into this world of emotional pain that evaluators tread, needing to go past the raw emotions and temporary upheaval to see the individual's more abiding capacities.

It is clear that this is not an easy job and it is certainly not one that psychologists take lightly. Lest anyone think that this could be done by someone without good knowledge of the ethical guidelines, current research, and accepted methods of evaluation, the psychologists who conduct these evaluations also understand that they can and will be cross examined in court, where they must be able to justify everything they have done and speak to whether it conforms to current standards for custody evaluations. Any psychologist who was unable to successfully explain these things in court would not

continue to be used by the courts or attorneys, who are looking for the highest quality of evaluation for their clients.

There is already a process available to the public to make a formal complaint if a mental health professional seems to have acted inappropriately or unethically and it follows a process similar to that of other professions. Other trained, licensed psychologists are in the best position to review a complaint about a psychologist and to understand whether the work that was done was conducted according to the relevant professional guidelines. HB6267 threatens to change that process in order to appease individuals who disagree with the conclusions of an evaluation. I urge the committee not to go along with a plan that is based upon retaliation against perceived hurts, rather than valid professional concerns.

Thank you,

*Nancy Randall, Psy.D.*

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Licensed Psychologist