

Testimony of Joanne Florio

in support of

SB 857- AN ACT CONCERNING LICENSURE FOR GENETIC COUNSELORS

February 20, 2015

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Markley, Representative Srinivasan and members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Joanne Florio. I am the supervising genetic counselor in the Department of Genetics at Yale School of Medicine where I have worked for 19 years. I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 857- An Act Concerning Licensure for Genetic Counselors.

Genetic counselors are graduate-trained professionals who specialize in genetic testing based on assessment of family history and other risk factors, and in interpretation of testing results for patients and their families.

President Obama recently announced the ‘Precision Medicine’ initiative, which will rapidly result in genetic testing and counseling becoming key elements of medical care and diagnosis. With this in mind, licensure is needed in order to ensure that the quality of these professionals remains high and that patients and consumers are protected from unqualified providers, and unregulated practices.

The State can prevent harm by ensuring that providers who represent themselves as genetic counselors have the appropriate training and continuing education. Such harm can include: incomplete risk assessments; incorrect testing ordered, results misinterpreted, inadequate/inappropriate genetic counseling resulting in serious adverse health effects including unnecessary prophylactic surgeries, delayed diagnoses, and psychological distress.

The demand for genetic counseling and testing is increasing. Licensure of genetic counselors will assist those healthcare providers making referrals by identifying qualified and appropriately trained professionals. Licensure will remove constraints on billing for genetic counseling, thereby allowing medical centers to hire more genetic counselors and improve patient access.

Incorporating genetic counselors into the laboratory testing process has been shown to lead to cost-efficient risk identification and more appropriate genetic testing. Significant savings in healthcare spending for patients with cancer, neurological disorders, cardiac disorders, and other genetic diseases has been documented.

Thank you for your time and interest in this important bill.

Sincerely yours,

Joanne R. Florio, MS, GCG
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