



Connecticut Department of Public Health

**Testimony Presented Before the Public Health Committee
March 18, 2015**

**Commissioner Jewel Mullen, MD, MPH, MPA
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**Senate Bill 991-- An Act Concerning the Department of Public Health's Recommendations
Regarding Persons Authorized to Solemnize Marriages**

The Department of Public Health (DPH) supports Senate Bill 991.

This proposal was put forth by DPH in order to clarify section 46b-22 of the Connecticut General Statutes concerning marriage officiators. The law as currently written allows ordained clergy to perform marriages in Connecticut, "as long as they continue in the work of the ministry." This language prompts endless inquiries from the public -- mostly from persons who have been ordained through on-line ministries -- about whether such persons are authorized to perform marriages in Connecticut.

What it means to "continue in the work of the ministry" has never been clearly defined. Thus, for on-line ordained ministers who do not perform conventional ministerial work -- such as leading a congregation -- the lack of definition about what it means to "continue in the work of the ministry" makes it difficult for the Department and local registrars to answer whether a person meets the requirements for performing marriages in Connecticut. The difficulty is further compounded by the Religion Clauses of the 1st Amendment of the US Constitution, which prohibits government from establishing or promoting a religion, or interfering in the free exercise of a religion.

Primarily, the Department seeks clarification, one way or another, about whether on-line ordained ministers are authorized to perform marriages. Under this proposal, such persons would be permitted to perform marriages.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's testimony.