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To: The Education Committee and General Assembly of the Connecticut Legislature  
Date: March 7, 2016  
RE: H.B. (Raised) "An Act Concerning Various Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes

I am writing in support of the revision of Sec. 11. Subsection (h) of H.B. (Raised): An Act Concerning Various Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes, which allows Marriage and Family Therapists to be qualified for certification to work in public schools if they are licensed or license-eligible.

I am writing as the director of the Master's program in Marriage & Family Therapy at CCSU. Our program graduates approximately 30 students per year into the Connecticut work force; approximately eight students each year complete a SDE-approved course of study for certification as school-based marriage and family therapists (MFTs).

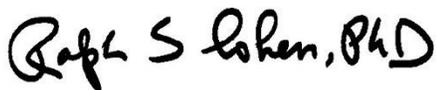
There are some very strong reasons why the amendment of the statute to allow license-eligible MFTs to become school-certified (assuming that the other requirement for such certification is met) is important to the state:

- (1) There currently is a teacher certification for school-based MFTs on the books; the law that created this certification also included the proviso that MFTs must be licensed by the Department of Public Health in order to qualify. Since the current licensing law precludes MFTs from obtaining their license for at least 12 months after they graduate, even with all other qualifications for the teacher certificate being met, the inability to obtain a license prevents them from obtaining said certificate for at least a year (most often, it realistically takes several years to meet all of the current licensing requirements; particularly due to the 100 supervision hour requirement, which amounts to 2 hours of supervision per week – which most employers do not provide). A bill is being introduced in the Public Health Committee to create an "associate license" for MFTs (which clinical social workers already have on the "books"), which will provide a formal structure for oversight of pre-licensed MFTs. Allowing **license-eligible MFTs** to become certified will allow otherwise-qualified candidates for the educator certificate to be employable in this specialty area at the point of graduation with their Master's degree (often with the interest of a school district that provided their practicum training experience to be able to hire the individual for full-time employment).
- (2) MFTs are trained differently from the other mental health disciplines and have a unique, evidence-based skill-set that others do not have; namely, the ability to look at the larger context to understand how both relationships and symptoms are inter-connected and to intervene on multiple levels of a system to find resolution to the relationship problems that create, maintain, and exacerbate symptomatic reactions to stressors that impact learning. The MFT skill-set is particularly suitable and adaptable to the school setting, and MFT training programs such as CCSU and others in the state have been placing students in schools for many years to provide such services. Our Master's program at CCSU's specialty track in School-Based MFT trains students in providing MFT services in the schools, which includes a one-year practicum in a school as an MFT. The current laws and regulations impede the newly-trained MFTs' ability to provide school-based services after they graduate by preventing schools from hiring them, thus constraining school systems from availing themselves to a valuable, tried-and-true resource to enhance students' ability to learn in school.

Given the recognized added value of MFTs in the workforce of the Mental Health field and in the school setting, the prevention of MFTs to become school-certified due to an excessive lag-time between graduation with the Master's degree and access to relevant employment needs to be corrected. Allowing MFTs to become school-certified while they are in the process of obtaining their professional licenses will serve both the professionals involved and the public in providing access to supervised clinical practice to professionals in the schools during these times of cutbacks in services due to shrinking budgets.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.

Sincerely,



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Director, CCSU MFT Program