

Testimony before the Public Health Committee

RE: Senate Bill 133 An Act Concerning Licensure for Professional Counselors

Public Health Committee, February 17, 2016

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and esteemed members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Tara Murphy and I am a Licensed Professional Counselor and Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor in private practice in Cheshire, CT. As a mental health clinician working in the community, I wish to voice my support for Senate Bill 133.

I have been working in the field of behavioral health for over 15 years, including nine years of ~~which were spent gaining~~ management experience, working in non-profit organizations and, finally, working in jail prior to going into private practice. I do this work for the parents who have lost children and don't know how to cope; I do it for the people who are questioning their desire to live; I do it for the intellectually disabled who want to connect with other people, hold jobs and live like the rest of us. I also do it for the people who want to change their lives and find a better path but don't know where to start.

Why does this matter? Because there is a large portion of the population^[MM1] living with mental illness that are underserved, in part because of the existing structure^[MM2]. It is our hope that professional counselors prepared under the standards being proposed today will be better suited to help these members of our community in an effective manner. The current licensure structure restricts graduates from obtaining jobs to help these individuals because employers frequently seek licensed individuals and there is not currently a license available upon graduation. Consequently, counselors are often under-employed because they need a license to get a job and a job to get a license. If passed into law, this bill's impact on the community and, particularly, on the lives of those most affected by mental illness will be undoubtedly improved by ensuring increased access and, through the proposed education and training standards, a higher standard of care overall.

Specifically, Senate Bill 133^[MM3], would create a two-tiered licensure structure, which would allow individuals graduating from a program that meets specific training criteria to apply to be a Licensed Master Professional Counselor (LMPC) immediately upon graduation. LMPCs would practice counseling under the supervision of an independently licensed mental health clinician. The current counseling license (LPC) would be renamed Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC). This two-tiered structure is currently employed in 37 states and is similar to the social work licensing process already in use in the State of Connecticut and the proposed MFT legislation (SB 68).^[MM4]

The two-tiered licensure structure would bring our profession to parity with other mental health clinicians. Additionally, SB 133 would greatly improve the education and supervision standards. It would require graduate coursework equivalent to the accreditation standards of the Council for the

Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), the national gold-standard for counselor education and supervision. By not affording us the same standards as other mental health professionals, a certain disparity is created as is a potential for the decrease in the quality of mental healthcare overall. Additionally, it may very well drive people completing their graduate studies in Connecticut to seek employment elsewhere as it is challenging enough already for new graduates to find employment without licensure.

In summary, SB 133 will increase the standards for licensure, ensure oversight, increase employability and support parity among mental health professionals. It would also align Connecticut's standards with 37 other states helping to ensure that graduates seeking employment stay in our State.

We therefore urge the committee to support SB 133 for the benefit of professional counselors and the many individuals they serve.

Respectfully,

Tara Murphy Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor Wallingford CT.