

February 23, 2016

Testimony before the Public Health Committee

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

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

My name is Barbara Bourgeois and I am an LPC in private practice in Woodbury, CT, a small community in Litchfield County. I wish to voice my support for SB 133 if the changes proposed by CCA are accepted.

SB133 will create a two-tiered licensure structure to allow individuals graduation from a program that meets specific training criteria to apply to be a Licensed Master Professional counselor (LMPC) immediately upon graduation. They would then practice under 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 used in 37 states and is similar to the social work license in Connecticut and the proposed MFT legislation (SB 68).

SB 133 would also greatly enhance curricular and supervision standards and require graduate coursework equivalent to CACREP or CORE, the national standard in counselor education and supervision.

At the age of 45, I embarked on a totally new career path in the mental health field. As most therapists will tell you, a personal story is usually behind the decision to pursue this kind of work. My story began when a close family member was diagnosed with depression at the age of 50. Never have I felt so helpless and unable to secure my loved one the help she needed. After 2 years of learning about the resources available and much trial and error, we finally found the winning combination of both therapy and psychiatric support. This is where my journey into the mental health field became official. Attending night school full time, I completed my degree requirements in two years and luckily found a paid internship with an agency who was willing to work with me as an unlicensed, master's level clinician. There was much confusion about what my degree, a master's in clinical mental health, qualified me to do. Many professionals in the field were not even convinced my degree lead to licensure. Now, 5 years later, as a licensed professional counselor, confusion still surrounds my credentials. As a therapist in private practice now, I receive fewer questions, however I find myself often explaining my credential by using the words, "I am exactly the same as a licensed clinical professional counselor" and this seems to clarify things for my clients and others.

In addition to the clarification of our title, SB 133, with the proposed CCA language will greatly help new graduates to help potential new clients under the supervision of licensed clinicians. As a private practitioner in a small town, I would never have expected the needs of my community to be so great. I work closely with 6 other therapists and we are all at close to if not complete capacity. I would eagerly take on a master's level clinician to assist with my caseload and give them the exposure they need to become better, more prepared clinicians. I have heard on more than one occasion how difficult it is to accumulate the necessary hours to attain licensure, often forcing newly graduated counselors to seek employment outside their field. What a waste!!

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

Respectfully,

Barbara Bourgeois MBA, MS, LPC

Woodbury, CT