



February 21, 2016

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

My name is Heidi Hughart and I am a LPC currently working at a non-profit agency in New Haven serving domestic abuse offenders. As a mental health clinician in the community, I wish to voice my support for **SB 133 An Act Concerning Licensure for Professional Counselors.**

I decided later in life to pursue my life long goal of becoming a professional counselor. Imagine my surprise, when upon graduating from a CACREP Master's degree program with distinction, I was unable to obtain a job to start working toward my 3,000 direct contact hour for licensure. I was stuck in the proverbial Catch-22, no one would hire me because I wasn't licensed and I couldn't get licensed because I couldn't get a job to obtain my direct contact hours. This went on for two years.

It never dawned on me that I would hit this major road block to fulfill my dream of becoming a professional counselor. Imagine my deep frustration of working hard to obtain my Master's Degree then facing a huge student loan debt that I couldn't begin to repay because I couldn't get a job in my chosen profession with an advanced degree.

We are in need of more mental health counselors. I fear we will soon experience a shortage of professional counselors due to the difficulty in finding employment allowing us to obtain the 3,000 direct contact hours necessary for licensure.

My story has a happy ending, I received my LPC this past Friday, four years after I graduated with my Master's Degree. Please pass this bill with the Connecticut Counseling Association's amendments to make it easier for those just starting their journey of working toward their LPC.

Respectfully submitted,

Heidi D. Hughart, LPC, NCC

