

Testimony before the Public Health Committee

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

Public Health Committee, February 24, 2016

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

My name is Sandra Enders and I am 57 years old. My age is important because I have been contemplating application to a Sixth Year Certificate program at SCSU in Clinical Mental Health Counseling for a few years. I have been hesitant due to difficulties and obstacles that I have experienced trying to enter the field in recent years. The uncertainty of licensing procedures in the state, and the quickly changing landscape in the field of clinical counseling, makes me question whether I want to take it on at this point in my life.

Over the past two decades I was lucky enough to be in a position that I could return to school, raise a child, and care for an aging parent, all while teaching online in higher education. During that time, I have completed three graduate degrees, and have become qualified to teach undergrad in political science, sociology, and psychology. Having had come from a very difficult childhood and family of origin, the field of psychology had always interested me, as I had spent many years in and out of counseling settings, trying to understand human emotions, and behavior. I had pursued much of my undergraduate work in that area earlier in life. But like many, I became lost in other avenues that were more lucrative and necessary at the time.

With my past experiences, which have been extensive, and my formal study, which I also have three undergrad degrees, I am at the position where I feel that I can make a positive difference in the field of counseling. But although I have completed two internships through the years in social work, I am told that the work would not benefit me for a mental health counseling license. Not only do I not have the time or interest in more formal study, as I now hold over 120 graduate credits in areas of social and behavioral studies, but I do not need any more to cover the nine domains that is needed for the license. I merely need the internship and practicum for the field experience.

I have been teaching as an adjunct for Housatonic Community College and Central Texas College, with steady employment for over 12 years, but unfortunately it is nearly impossible to land a tenured spot in the system, especially at my age, so there is no advancement there. It took me five years of actively searching for work in the mental health counseling field to get a part time offer from Wheeler Clinic, which was an entry level position at \$12.50 an hour. It was an hour drive to the job in Plainville from my home, and after six months I had to give it up because of the commute. But even more discouraging than that, is that the hours were not even considered clinical, so I cannot use them toward licensing in the state. I am currently registered and hold a Counselor in Training designation with the Connecticut Certification Board for drug and alcohol counseling on route to the license in addictions counseling. In trying to break into the addictions area, I became a CT State Volunteer and worked at the Substance Abuse Treatment Unit in New Haven for almost a year, but left with no job prospects.

It has been discouraging for me to deal with the rejection of simple entry level positions due to the lack of a license. The field where I know that I could put all my talents to work in my later years is in mental health counseling, but it has been nearly impossible to break in. If not for the support that the CT Counseling Association has offered me, I would have given up years ago.

I wish to voice my support for SB 133 because if approved it would remove the guesswork for me of whether or not pursuing the 6th year program would benefit me in getting work in the field. This legislation would create a two-tiered licensure structure to 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). I completely support the committee in approving SB 133 for the benefit of professional counselors and the many individuals they serve.

Sincerely, Sandra Enders, MS, SYC, MA

East Haven, CT