

March 12, 2017

**Jennifer D. Cunningham, LMFT  
(H.B. No. 7253 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO  
THE EDUCATION STATUTES).**

My name is Jennifer Cunningham, and I am a licensed Marriage and Family therapist since 2004. I have been working in a public school since 2016 through a contracted mental health program that provides mental health support to special education students within public schools. I am also in the process of getting certified to become employed by public schools through Boards of Education at Central Connecticut State University, one of two universities that provide school based MFT certification in Connecticut.

This testimony is written in **support** of adding “or a candidate for licensure as a marital and family therapist” to the current statute that states: (requested addition highlighted in yellow)

(h) Any person who is a licensed marital and family therapist, pursuant to section 20-195c, *or a candidate for licensure as a marital and family therapist*, and employed by a local or regional board of education as a marital and family therapist shall provide services to students, families and parents or guardians of students.

Although this addition is minor, it will make a huge difference to the eligibility of MFT candidates who would like to work in public schools. First, this amendment has already been granted as a part of the education statute for other mental health providers, such as Social Work and Professional Counselors whom are interested in pursuing a career in public education. In addition, this minor addition would allow MFT mental health providers the ability to work toward licensure and certification simultaneously, which would open the door for recent graduates to work in schools. Delaying the opportunity to begin the certification process until after a candidate is licensed delays important opportunities to learn and establish important relationships within the public school milieu.

As a current provider to students at a local public school, the importance of working in an educational environment as early as possible in order to gain experience with providing mental health support to students, while also navigating the intricacies of school administration and policies is imperative. The role of the therapist is an integral part of the educational system and the sooner a mental health provider can begin the better it is for the provider and the educational system as a whole.

In closing, I am in **full support** of the minor addition to the current education statute that would include a candidate for licensure be eligible to work in schools.

Sincerely,

*Jennifer D. Cunningham, LMFT*

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