Public Health Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7198
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING SOCIAL WORKERS.
Vote Date: 3/22/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/4/2019
File No.: 

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill prohibits anyone who does not have a social work degree from using the title “social worker” or advertising services as a social worker. Existing law already prohibits anyone who is unlicensed from using the title of licensed master or clinical social worker or advertising services as such. Due to existing law (CGS 20-195r) the bill does not prevent any person employed by the state before October 1, 1996 with a title in the social work series of the classified service from using the title to describe his or her duties.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:
Raul Pino, MD, MPH, Commissioner of the Department of Public Health (DPH): The Department is opposed to this bill which would restrict the use of the title “social worker” to only licensed clinical social workers and master social workers. This bill would prohibit anyone, including an unlicensed person with a degree in social work who does not practice clinically, from calling themselves a social worker. Social work is a broad field that often includes non-clinical functions. An individual who has a degree in social work may work in a non-clinical setting such as a community organization or be involved in policy and research. This bill would prevent these individuals from calling themselves a social worker. The Department believes that this bill is too restrictive.

Vannessa Dorantes, Commissioner, Department of Children and Families (DCF): The Department understands and appreciates the intent of the bill but believes that there are negative implications that need to be addressed. As currently drafted, this bill would prevent any professional from using the title social worker in a job classification, if that individual does not have a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree in social work. DCF has a number of job classifications that include social worker in the job title, ranging from Social Worker Trainee to
Social Worker Supervisor. Although individuals in these positions have undergraduate degrees, not all are in the field of social work. Connecticut has historically recognized related degrees as acceptable for an applicant to qualify for these positions. Also, this bill as currently written would make it difficult for the Department to meet its affirmative action goals as the field of social work is predominately female whereas related fields such as psychology and criminal justice attract more males. DCF continues to face challenges in hiring men. This bill would make the challenge even more difficult. The Commissioner has agreed to continue conversations with the proponents of this bill.

**Representative Jillian Gilchrest, 18th Assembly District, Connecticut General Assembly:**
Rep. Gilchrest supports this bill which simply states that to use the title social worker you must hold a degree in social work. She believes that this legislation will not prevent an individual from performing social worker tasks as long as they do not identify themselves as, or use, the title social worker. There are other titles that could be used to identify the type of work being performed such as case manager, human services worker or caseworker. Rep. Gilchrist points that Connecticut already protects the title of many other professions, including Psychologist, Physical Therapist, Massage Therapist and Chiropractor. The same protection should be afforded to social workers. In her testimony, Rep. Gilchrest requests that the language in the bill be amended to include individuals who hold a Bachelor in Social Work degree or a Masters in Social Work degree but, due to the type of work they perform, are not required to be licensed in Connecticut.

**Rep. Cristin McCarthy Vahey, 133rd District, Connecticut General Assembly:**
Rep. McCarthy Vahey shared that she is a social worker who does not possess a license and requests that the language in this bill be amended as recommended by the Connecticut National Association of Social Workers (CT/NASW) to read: “that no person shall use the title of social worker unless said person has attained a baccalaureate or master’s degree in social work from an accredited program of a doctoral degree in social work. Persons using the title of social worker without a degree in social work may be fined an amount of $250 and ordered to cease to use the title of social worker”. In her testimony, Rep. McCarthy Vahey noted that a number of other professions have title protection, including massage therapists. Unlicensed social workers provide a number of vital non-clinical healthcare services and she believes that if we can protect the title of massage therapist, our state can certainly recognize the same for educated and trained social workers.

**Rep. Anne Meiman Hughes, 135th Assembly District:** As a licensed social worker, Rep. Hughes recognizes how important it is for vulnerable consumers to be assured that a social worker is professionally trained, accredited and licensed. This is why title protection is so important. This bill will not restrict individuals without a degree in social work from performing social services as long as they do not refer to themselves as a social worker. This bill will not cause workers to lose their jobs. Rep. Hughes requests the same language change referred to Rep. McCarthy Vahey’s testimony.

**Rep. Pat Wilson Pheanious, 53rd Assembly District:** Rep. Pheanious opposes this bill. Although, the bill is intended to protect the public from substandard services by restricting the use of the term social worker, it does not achieve that goal with the current language in the proposal. Rep. Pheanious believes that all social workers in Connecticut who have completed a professional course of study from an accredited school of social work should
have the right to use the title social worker whether or not they are licensed. This potential problem would be addressed by amending the language of the bill, as indicated above in testimony from Rep. McCarty Vahey.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Ashley Blanchard MSW, Chair of the National Association of Social Worker’s, Connecticut Chapter (NASW/CT):** Many professions in Connecticut have been afforded title protection ensuring that anyone using the title of the profession has earned a degree in that field from an accredited institution. If someone has not earned a degree in a particular profession such as chiropractor, dentist, practical nurse or veterinarian, they cannot use the specific title. This same treatment should be afforded to social workers. This bill would not cause people to lose their jobs. This bill does not restrict a person from performing social service tasks as long as they do not identify themselves as, or use, the title social worker. There are many titles which could be used to describe the type of work provided, such as, case manager, human services worker or caseworker. However, Ms. Blanchard supports a language change in the bill. As written, the bill would only apply to licensed social workers and prohibits non-licensed social worker, including those who hold a BSW from using the title. NASW/CT has testified against this restrictive language in the past and has submitted substitute language for HB 7198. Passing the bill in its current form is far too restrictive. Ms. Blanchard urges the Committee to revise the language, support and pass the bill.

**Nina Heller, Dean of the UConn School of Social Work:** Dr. Heller supports the intent of the DPH to protect the title of social worker. However, as currently written the language does not cover all professional social workers who have attained a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) or Masters of Social Work (MSW) degrees and are accredited by the rigorous standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). This accreditation process is standard across all states. Dr. Heller urges the Committee to consider amending the language so that the title protection for social workers also includes those individuals who hold social work degrees from CSWE accredited programs.

**Marcy Kane, PhD, CT Licensed Psychologist, Clinical Psychologist Association (CPA), CPA Legislative Committee Chair:** Ms. Kane supports this legislation because she believes any person who uses the title “social worker” should be licensed as a clinical social worker. Having many different levels of practitioners in Connecticut, each with their own level of training and expertise, it is important for consumers of behavioral health services to be assured that they are receiving services from a licensed person. HB 7198 would provide clarity for consumers regarding social work providers.

**Brianna Benn-Mirandi:** Ms. Benn-Mirandi supports title protection for Social Worker whether an individual has achieved a bachelor’s level, master’s level and or is licensed. The mental health field is tightly regulated in Connecticut. Properly trained social workers have to demonstrate a level of education, perseverance and personal stability. They are reliable and competent in the work that they do. However, when anyone can claim to be a social worker without having the required education and training, the public is not being properly informed.
NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Mag Morelli, President, LeadingEdge Connecticut: Ms. Morelli presented testimony on behalf of LeadingAge Connecticut, an association representing not-for-profit provider organizations serving older adults across the continuum of aging services. The association is opposed to this legislation because it would place an increased burden on nursing homes and other aging services providers who employ social workers. Nursing homes are required to employ qualified social workers in numbers sufficient to meet the needs of their residents. Currently, state and federal nursing home regulations define a qualified social worker as an individual who has a bachelor’s degree in social work. If the requirements were raised as proposed in this bill, it would mandate nursing homes to hire social workers or clinical social workers to replace the qualified and competent staff currently employed. This significant burden would be placed not only on nursing homes, but residential care homes, home health care agencies, hospice agencies, adult day care centers, assisted living facilities, senior housing and life plan communities. The organization urges the Committee to reject this legislation.

Amy Myers, Licensed Clinical Social Worker: In her testimony Ms. Myers points out that “social worker” should not be thought of as a generic term for those who want to help others, but as a disciplined profession with a systematic licensing process, educational and practice standards and clear scopes of practice. No other profession would allow individuals to claim their title without obtaining the required skills. While Ms. Myers supports the intent of the bill she requests that the language be amended to include the recommendation of the Connecticut/ National Association of Social Workers (CT/ NAWS). The most important reason to protect the title social worker is to protect vulnerable consumers.

Kathleen Callahan, Connecticut Women’s Consortium, CT NASW 2018 Student of the Year: Ms. Callahan supports title protection for all social workers and understands that it is the intent of the bill. However, the current language actually restricts the use of the title. Ms. Callahan urges the committee to update the language and, while she supports the spirit of the bill, without the language change recommended by the CT/NASW, she believes many clients will be left without the services of a qualified and readily available workforce.

Joni Beth Roderick, LMSW: Ms. Roderick cannot support the bill as written because in its current form it would effectively ban Bachelor of Social Workers (BSWs) and non-licensed Master of Social Workers (MSWs) from calling themselves social workers. This is exactly the opposite of what is needed. Ms. Roderick encourages support for title protection for social workers, but urges the substitution of the language with the language submitted by NASW/CT.

Cindy Dubuque-Gallo, Licensed Master of Social Work (MSW): Ms. Dubuque-Gallo support title protection but cannot support this bill as written because it would effectively disavow those in the profession who have earned a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) or who hold a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree and yet are unable to obtain a license. Current, statute allows for social workers in non-clinical roles who have obtained the appropriate education and training to be exempt from licensure. Ms. Gallo does not believe she should
have to be licensed for clinical work to be recognized as a social worker when the field is so much greater.

**Diana Lombardi, Master’s of Social Worker (MSW):** Ms. Lombardi earned a Master’s in Social Work from UConn with a concentration in community organizing referred to as macro social worker. Under this bill, she would be breaking the law if she referred to herself as a social worker. Currently, she is not required to be licensed to call herself a social worker. If this bill were to be enacted it would effectively wipe out her degree. She urges rejection as written.

**Liz Gustafson, MSW:** Although Ms. Gustafson supports the intent of the bill to provide title protection for social workers, the limited scope of the legislation would only allow individuals with a license in social work to designate themselves as professional “social workers”. This would ultimately discredit social workers who are unable to obtain a license and inhibit us from accurately representing ourselves.

**Herbert Jay Rosenfield, LCSW, Director, Adolescent & Family Counseling Center, LLC:** Mr. Rosenfeld supports protection of the title ”social worker” to refer only to those who have completed the coursework and attained the ethical foundation of the social work profession. However, the wording of the current bill is faulty, limiting the title protection only to those who have obtained licensure in Connecticut. It is Mr. Rosenfeld’s professional opinion, which includes the support and sponsorship of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, that the language of the bill should be amended to include and cover those colleagues who have completed a BSW or an MSW but who are not licensed.

An additional 40 individuals submitted testimony indicating support for the bill if the language is amended as proposed by the Connecticut/ National Association of Social Workers (CT/ NASW) to include individuals with a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) or a Master’s of Social Work (MSW) even if practicing in a non-clinical area.

Reported by: Kathleen Panazza  
Date: March 28, 2019