

Testimony to the House Regulatory Reform Committee
October 15, 2013
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My name is Lee McDonagh. I am a registered dietitian nutritionist and I have been practicing in the state of MI for 40 years. I am currently the lead nutrition specialist at the Center for Eating disorders in Ann Arbor, MI and at the Huron Oaks Eating Disorder Recovery Program in Ypsilanti MI. I also have a private practice where I meet with clients who have diabetes, obesity, heart disease and celiac disease.

I oppose House Bill 4688 which would repeal the Nutrition and Dietetics Licensure law.

Is the state of Michigan going to continue to protect the safety and health of its residents, where services are provided by qualified practitioners who work as a team in the patient-centered health care setting? Or is the state of Michigan going to allow the most vulnerable and most victimized people, namely people with chronic disease such as diabetes, heart disease, celiac disease and obesity, to be treated by the non-qualified practitioners. Patient safety has been addressed by the Michigan Medical Society, the Michigan Primary Care Consortium, the Michigan American Academy of Pediatricians and other organizations and they have concluded that the most qualified healthcare professionals are the registered dietitian nutritionist. **Is it not the duty of the state to assure that its residents have the highest quality of health care?** The Nutrition and Dietetics Licensure Law is all about patient safety and health for the residents of Michigan. **It is not about insurance reimbursement and definitely not about money, at least not from registered dietitian nutritionists. This is about patient safety.**

The ARC committee and the supporters of this bill want documentation of harm taken off the table, no one died, so it is not real. Unfortunately the ARC committee sought little, or in our case, **NO** input from the Michigan Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, however, we still sought to get information about patient safety and health care delivery in front of the ARC for consideration to the extent that we were allowed. Instead, **the ARC committee chose to dismiss document of harm** and we were not allowed to speak in our defense. The Michigan Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics submitted many cases of harm: physical, emotional and economic harm which have occurred and continue to occur to MI residents. **As a registered dietitian nutritionist who lives by a Code of Ethics, I cannot and will not take harm off the table.**

By the way, harm can be physical, economic or emotional. My clients report harm frequently. Doctors and other qualified healthcare professionals see harm daily. Harm has ranged from overprescribing of supplements by unqualified nutritionists, such as the client with a 30 lb. weight loss who was prescribed many supplements to treat her fatigue, hair loss, numb feet and decreased eyesight. She was spending \$200-\$300 per month on these supplements without any change in her symptoms when her husband was advised his family doctor to bring her to me. I became immediately concerned as a result of my assessment, referred her immediately to our medical director, who sent her to the ER where she was diagnosed with Congestive Heart Failure. Many health care dollars were spent in ER costs, cardiovascular specialist fees and the dollars spent on the supplements which harmed her. This is harm: physical and economic. Another client was told by another unqualified nutritionist to take supplements to cure her gastrointestinal complaints and her fatigue. No relief, so more supplements, till the bill was too high for her to bear and still no relief. This is harm: financial, emotional and economic. This story however ends happily; she told her physician who referred her to me for nutritional counseling. Food cured the problem.

For 15 months I counseled a track and cross-country athlete who attended a private school. Her athletic coach one day told the athletes that they would look like that an overweight person watching the track meet if they did not run and stop eating high calorie foods (nutrition misinformation). Well, my client stopped the high calorie foods, kept running

and lost over 20% of her ideal body weight and was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa by her physician. After my client recovered, she decided to run cross-country once again the same athletic coach repeated the same warning to the athletes, calling overweight people "elephants". My client quit the team. She had spent too much time and money to recover from her eating disorder to have this person do this again. Athletic coaches are often a great influence on the students who want to compete, be the star athlete and yet they are untrained and unskilled to deliver nutrition information. This is harm.

How about a 64 year old woman with type 2 diabetes who was told (once again by an unqualified nutritionist) to take a supplement and it would cure her diabetes? This is harm. Her physician referred her to me and I assisted her in managing her diabetes with food, not supplements. I have many more harm cases to report but it seems that they have fallen on deaf ears, no one died.

Are MI residents to be ignored? Harm is real to someone who believes that the person that they are speaking with is qualified to give them advice about their health. It goes to trust and ethics. Yet, many, many Michigan residents do not vet or research the credentials of the health professional they are entrusting with their healthcare. Michigan residents deserve to know who is a credible source of nutrition information. Licensure is the recognized process that gives residents that assurance. This repeal bill doesn't keep people in their "nutrition" jobs, it is actually a pathway for unqualified people to promote themselves as knowledgeable about nutrition and health. It is deceptive and an injustice to the people of Michigan who look to YOU, government representatives, to identify who is the most qualified professional in the healthcare field. **Please do not tell me that it is okay to for everything in Michigan to stay just the same as it is because just the way it is, IS HURTING PEOPLE! Harm is real, the healthcare team supports the registered dietitian nutritionist's credential for expert nutrition care services in Michigan.**

I have mentored many students and young dietitians throughout my career. I teach them about becoming recognized members of the healthcare team, living the code of ethics and staying in Michigan to work. But without licensure, they may choose to move to a state where their credentials are valued. I understood that retaining our students in Michigan was one of Governor Snyder's goals. But these students, training to be the experts on nutrition care, will have spent 4 to 5 years in college, completed their 1200 hours or experience, taken a certified exam and have thousands of dollars in loans to learn that the person sitting next to them has a 6 to 12 month certificate online or otherwise and can still have a license to practice as a licensed registered dietitian nutritionist. What a national tragedy! What will be their recourse? Move to a state that values their education and their knowledge with legal recognition and makes them an integral part of the health care team. Is this what you want? I can assure you that that is not what I want.

I urge you to strongly consider your vote and the impact it will have now and in the future for Michigan residents.

Michigan residents deserve the best, the most credible nutrition information to secure their health and Registered Dietitian Nutritionists are the most qualified healthcare professionals.