

# Testimony of Elizabeth Getting

Good Morning.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for HB 2137/2138.

Two of the 30 accredited graduate Masters programs in genetic counseling in North America are located in Pennsylvania (at Arcadia University and the University of Pittsburgh – which I co-direct within the School of Public Health). Many graduates choose to stay and practice in Pennsylvania, making it the state with the third highest number of genetic counselors in the United States.

Licensure will create clear educational, certification, and continuing education standards for all genetic counselors in the Commonwealth. Licensure will ensure greater patient access to competent genetic counselors. The goal is for patients to make more informed decisions about their genetic health care enabling them to seek methods to prevent disease and stay healthy. Genetics is a complex science and protection of the public is critical in this area of health care.

This legislation's intent is to ensure that individuals and families who are being counseled on genetic information are provided that information by qualified and trained practitioners. This assures protection of the public. As a genetic counseling program director and a provider of genetic services myself, I know that providing services to help individuals and families translate scientific knowledge into practical information is a challenging task. A genetic counselor works with a person or family that may be at risk for an inherited disease. One of the lessons we have learned from the Human Genome Project is we are all at risk for a health condition. As tests become available for the public, it is our responsibility to assure accurate information is being provided by appropriately trained professionals.

In order to respect your time, I thought I would address several common questions regarding licensure.

**1. Don't genetic counselors already have licensure?**

No, genetic counselors have certification, not licensure.

Genetic counselors may take the national board examination and receive certification from the American Board of Genetic Counseling. Eligibility to take the board examination requires appropriate education and training, but is voluntary and, therefore, is not a legally enforceable standard. Licensure will ensure the responsible practice of genetic counselors in Pennsylvania, protecting the consumer from harm and providing a mechanism for recourse when consumers are harmed. Just as physicians and nurses have both board certification and state licensure, so should genetic counselors.

**2. Do other states have licensure for Genetic Counselors?**

Currently six states have legislation for genetic counselor licensure: Utah, California, Illinois, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Massachusetts. Licensure bills have been introduced in eight additional states including ours: Florida, New

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Jersey, Texas, Washington, Missouri, New York, and Washington. Licensure is actively being pursued in about 12 other states.

**3. Will licensure for genetic counselors affect the practice of nurses, physicians and therapists?**

No, the licensure of genetic counselors in Pennsylvania and other states will not prevent licensed health care providers from providing patient services within their scope of practice. Physicians, nurses and other health care professionals providing genetic services or counseling under their respective scopes of practice can continue doing so.

**4. How many genetic counselors are there in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania who will be affected by licensure?**

There are approximately 180 genetic counselors currently practicing in Pennsylvania. Almost all are certified through the American Board of Genetic Counseling and affiliated with major medical centers across the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania genetic counselors work with families throughout their lifespan. We can be found in a variety of settings, including major medical centers, clinical and research laboratories, public health, and academics.

I urge you to pass HB 2137/2138. Thank you.

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