



TESTIMONY OF ROBIN E. GRUBS, PhD, CGC, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN  
BOARD OF GENETIC COUNSELING

SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE COMMITTEE

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Chairperson Sturla, Ranking Member Adolph, distinguished Members; I am Robin Grubs, a Certified Genetic Counselor and President of the American Board of Genetic Counseling (ABGC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony with regards to licensure for certified genetic counselors in Pennsylvania.

Genetic counselors are health care professionals trained to translate complicated genetic information to patients in an uncomplicated way, to enhance understanding and facilitate appropriate medical management. Genetic counselors often practice as part of a health care team. They interpret and provide clear and comprehensive information about the risk of medical conditions that have a genetic contribution. They ascertain the usefulness of genetic technologies for individuals and families and facilitate an informed decision-making process that elicits and respects the spectrum of personal beliefs and values. Integral to the practice is the interpretation of family and medical histories to assess the chance of disease occurrence or recurrence; education about inheritance, testing, management, prevention, resources and research; and counseling to promote informed choices and adaptation to the risk or condition.

The ABGC is dedicated to maintaining the highest level of professionalism in the field of genetic counseling. Serving as a credentialing organization for the genetic counseling profession in the United States and Canada, ABGC establishes the standards of competence for clinical practice through accreditation of graduate programs in genetic counseling and advances the role of genetic counselors in healthcare through the certification and recertification of qualified professionals. In this way, the work of ABGC promotes the ongoing growth of the genetic counseling profession and allows the public to identify individuals who have met established standards of knowledge, skills, and practice for their profession. As a credentialing organization, ABGC recognizes that certification is a non-statutory process whereby a credentialing body grants recognition to an individual who meets specified qualifications. In contrast to licensure, which is mandatory to perform a professional activity and is enforced by government, certification is not needed to practice, but rather is a statement of qualification.

ABGC credentialing is an element in the licensing procedures outlined in HB2137 and HB2138 and for this reason, my testimony addresses ABGC certification, recertification and accreditation processes. I hope the committee will find this information useful as it moves forward with its work. ABGC conducts ongoing review of its credentialing requirements to reflect changing professional demands within a rapidly evolving field and to follow best practices in the

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credentialing industry. ABGC constituents are informed of any approved changes to the examination frequency, certification period and other important matters through an annual business meeting, electronic communications, and postings to the ABGC website. Licensing bodies may contact ABGC for information about current and future requirements.

#### *Certification*

Certification by ABGC, designated by the acronym CGC<sup>®</sup>, indicates that an individual is qualified to provide genetic counseling services. All ABGC certified genetic counselors have at least a masters' degree. Currently, 8% of all certified genetic counselors in the United States reside in Pennsylvania. To achieve certification, genetic counseling professionals must pass a comprehensive examination that is developed and administered by ABGC. The examination is designed to assess necessary knowledge and skills of genetic counseling practice. Certified individuals have demonstrated their competency by qualifying for and passing an objective, nationally relevant certification examination based on an analysis of current practice; this promotes the protection of the public from less qualified practitioners. The ABGC Executive Office can provide verification of certification status.

In the recent past, the examination was offered every other year, but beginning in 2009 the examination will be offered on an annual basis. Genetic counselors who meet the eligibility requirements to take the examination, which includes verification of specialized training, are given the designation "Active Candidate Status (ACS)." Graduates may be eligible for temporary/provisional licensure through ACS while awaiting the next available examination administration. To date, all states that license genetic counselors have used the ABGC examination for licensure qualifications.

#### *Recertification*

Beginning in 1996, genetic counselors certified by ABGC were issued time-limited certificates and are required to recertify. Recertification demonstrates a dedication to maintaining knowledge and skills in an evolving and dynamic field. Recertification can be obtained by re-examination or continuing education (averaging 25 clock hours/year over the certification period). Voluntary recertification is available and encouraged for genetic counselors certified before 1996.

#### *Accreditation*

The ABGC establishes and maintains criteria and procedures for the accreditation and reaccreditation of graduate programs in genetic counseling. The ABGC publishes appropriate standards of quality for graduate genetic counseling programs and provides recognition for degree-granting programs at the master's level that meet or exceed the minimum standards. Programs accredited by the ABGC must meet requirements within three main areas: didactic coursework, clinical training and scholarly research. Graduate coursework includes human, medical and clinical genetics, psychosocial theory and techniques, and social, ethical and legal issues. Graduates must demonstrate significant hands-on involvement with counseling individuals and families affected with a broad range of genetic conditions. Graduation from an accredited program is one requirement for eligibility to sit for the ABGC Certification Examination. Currently, there are 32 genetic counseling graduate programs in North America that are accredited by ABGC; two are located in Pennsylvania.

#### *Conclusion*

On behalf of ABGC, I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to provide testimony. As a credentialing organization for genetic counselors, ABGC is concerned with matters of public protection in the area of genetic counseling services. The ABGC is available as a resource for the committee as it moves forward with this endeavor.