

Testimony of Susan M. Lowenberg
House Professional Licensure Committee Public Hearing
Concerning House Bill 2715 and HB 2716
August 13, 2008

My name is Susan Lowenberg and I serve as the Christian Science Committee on Publication for Pennsylvania – enabling lawmakers and journalists to secure accurate information regarding Christian Science. Dan Herr, our Counsel, is also present. I am here to speak in support of amendments to House Bill 2715 and House Bill 2716. The amendment language that you have before you is the result of cooperative efforts between my office and the Pennsylvania State Nurses Association (“PSNA”). It would allow Christian Science nurses to identify themselves as “Christian Science nurses” so long as they disclose to patients that they are not registered nurses or licensed practical nurses. These amendments are important because use of the term “Christian Science nurse” is fundamental to the practice of Christian Science. In fact, the title is established in the constitutional governing document of the Christian Science church.

Thank you to each Representative who took time to meet with us to discuss the issues raised by this bill in the context of Christian Science nursing. In addition, I wish to express special gratitude to the representatives of the PSNA for their cooperation and willingness to work with us to draft acceptable amendment language. By enacting this amendment, Pennsylvania will be joining nine other States that have enacted statutory provisions that protect the use of the term “nurse” while accommodating the use of the term “Christian Science nurse.” Many jurisdictions outside the United States, such as the United Kingdom and all of the Australian States save one, have also accommodated use of this title.

Christian Science is a prayer-based method of healing that has been practiced in Pennsylvania for over a century. Christian Science nurses provide spiritual support and physical care consistent with the theology of Christian Science to individuals who request their services and who have chosen to rely on prayer for healing instead of medical care. The term “Christian Science nurse” is established in Article VIII, Section 31 of the constitutional governing document of the Christian Science Church, which is known as the *Church Manual*. The practice of Christian Science nursing and the use of the title “Christian Science nurse” are therefore central to the practice of Christian Science.

Pennsylvania law accommodates the practice of Christian Science nursing, using language that is very similar to the amendment language under consideration today. The amendments before you today make clear that a Christian Science nurse can use his/her *Manual* based title.

Christian Science nurses do not administer medications or perform any form of medical intervention or treatment. Christian Science nurses only provide services to those who have decided to pursue an entirely nonmedical, spiritual approach to healing – that is to say, the

patient has decided that he or she wants to rely on prayer *instead of* medical care and treatment. Patients who elect to receive Christian Science nursing services are at all times free to choose the form of care and treatment that best meets their needs. If a patient receiving the services of a Christian Science nurse decides that he or she would prefer to have medical care, the Christian Science nurse would help the individual find an appropriate care provider before ceasing to provide services.

I am especially grateful for everyone's consideration of these amendments because I have had personal, firsthand experience with the benefits of Christian Science nursing care. Earlier this year, a family member took a fall in the middle of the night. It was the express desire of this individual to rely on prayer for healing in lieu of medical care, as she had done successfully on so many previous occasions in her life. She had stated this wish in her health care proxy – a legal document for family to follow.

After the fall, this family member received spiritual, Bible-based prayer from a Christian Science practitioner. However, she also needed physical help with her care during this time. The in-home services of a Christian Science nurse were obtained in order to provide necessary care while the patient was praying for healing. The Christian Science nurse helped the patient to use a walker, assisted with bathing, helped her to dress and provided meals to the patient. Within a short period the patient was able to walk, and progressed from using a walker to a cane. This family member found full recovery and is now living on her own, walking without the use of any cane or walker, bathing herself, driving her car, doing errands and cooking meals. The tender, loving, encouraging assistance given to our family member by the Christian Science nurse enabled the patient to find once again the great and beautiful blessing of this system of healing.

It is important for people like my family member who wish to rely on prayer rather than medical care for healing to have access to the services of Christian Science nurses. Our proposed amendment is in the best interest of patients. It *allows* individuals to have access to religious nonmedical care while requiring service providers to be clear with patients about the services they are qualified to provide. I thank each of you for your consideration of these amendments and ask that you support these in your voting session.

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