

Proponent Testimony on House Bill 406
House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee
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Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide additional proponent testimony on House Bill 406, legislation to include forensic evaluators and providers of probate evaluations as individuals whose residential and familial information is exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Law.

My name is Dr. Meredith Veltri, and I am the Assistant Director of Forensic Services for the Netcare Forensic Center. You will recall that I previously testified in support of this legislation. I'm here today to address the proposed amendment, as well as to follow up regarding questions that you posed during the first hearing.

Today I would like to focus on three things: 1) what the proposed bill would change, 2) what is not changed by the bill, and 3) why an amendment regarding Regional Psychiatric Hospital staff is important.

In terms of what this bill does, it quite simply would allow mental health professionals who work with mental health evaluatees (predominantly those in forensic settings) to petition public offices to remove or redact our home addresses, and those of our family members. That's all.

With regard to what House Bill 406 does not do, it in no way restricts an examinee's due process rights, nor does it in any way place limitations on an examinee's ability to contact us at our place of employment. For example, court orders and subpoenas are delivered to our places of employment, where we also get phone calls from attorneys and examinees. This bill will not impact such processes. Importantly, this bill in no way interferes with our obligation to provide examinees with the contact information that they need should they choose to advance a complaint against us based upon our evaluation. In short, House Bill 406 changes nothing in terms of stakeholders (e.g., judges, attorneys) or examinees' ability to contact us at our place of employment.

Concerning the amendment to add Regional Psychiatric Hospital staff to the bill, it was never our intention to exclude such individuals, and we think this is an excellent addition that just makes sense. The primary reason for this is that these staff work with precisely the same population that we do. We believe that their serving the same population as those who are already provided these protections under the law, such as attorneys, police officers, correctional officers, and investigators meets the test of common sense. Importantly, such staff would still be easily contacted at work but not at home in their capacity as private citizens.

I recently spoke with a pharmacist from a Regional Psychiatric Hospital who asked that I share her story. She has been employed there for 17 years. There was a patient whom she had to redirect from inappropriate interactions on multiple occasions. He was eventually discharged back to a prison, from which he sent her packages containing men's underwear and inappropriate letters because he was able to obtain her home address. She stated he is

scheduled to be released in 2019, and she is very fearful because he knows where she lives. She stated she pursued addressing this incident with the highway patrol, her workplace, and the prosecutor's office. In the end, there were no charges to file, and there was nothing she could do to protect herself because the law does not presently provide for her to remove her information. She asked me to share that she fervently hopes that this bill will be given consideration and pass to protect the safety of those whose job is to serve this challenging population.

In closing, I would like to note that we fully accept our need to be responsible and take reasonable steps to safeguard our digital footprints on social media sites. What we need your help with is keeping personal and private information private. Specifically, without this bill, any action we might take to safeguard our information is useless, as many "people finder" websites simply repopulate their data on a monthly basis from voter registration information. That is, even if we contact each one of those websites to have our information removed, it is automatically repopulated on an ongoing basis because it is drawn from information that is publicly available as a matter of law. Until this dangerous loophole is closed by changing the statute, our home addresses are readily available to individuals who may wish to cause us harm based on our fulfilling our professional obligations.

Thank you, and thank you to Representative Lanese and her staff for their work on this measure. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.