

Proponent Testimony on House Bill 41
House Civil Justice Committee
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Greetings, Chairman Hillyer, Vice Chair Grendell, Ranking Member Galonski, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 41, and thank you to Representatives Lanese and Liston for their work on this bill.

My name is Dr. Emily Weber, and I am currently employed as a forensic psychologist at Netcare Forensic Center wherein my duties consist of conducting different types of evaluations for individuals currently involved with the criminal justice system. Previously, I was employed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), and thus have knowledge of the safeguards surrounding private information that exist in other agencies and jurisdictions. This information is relevant insofar as it allows me to compare the differences surrounding attention to privacy while the circumstances of individuals with whom I'm interacting in my capacity at Netcare are quite similar. While my testimony is in no way meant to overgeneralize or overinflate the relationship between violence and mental illness, in some cases, for reasons both related and unrelated to mental illness, violent incidents do occur, and it is important to me that I advocate for the necessary protection, for myself and those who work in a similar capacity. My testimony serves to highlight that a vulnerability exists and suggests a simple solution to eliminating that vulnerability, that, if exploited, could have disastrous (though preventable) consequences.

I want to be clear about what supporting this bill means and what it does not mean. The passing of this bill would simply allow mental health professionals who work in forensic settings to petition public offices to remove or redact our private information to include home addresses, and those of our family members. Nothing more. There are a number of safety measures taken into consideration at my place of work, and it is the sensible thing to do to take the easy and practical step of removing personal information, accessible to anyone, in order to effectively extend these safeguards to our homes and those that live with us in our homes.

What this bill does not do is allow for mental health professionals who work in forensic settings to be inaccessible or unpunishable. In fact, with every evaluation we complete, we take the time to review the individual's rights with regard to filing grievances. With each report submitted to the Court, contact information is provided. Filing a complaint with the state licensing board is also an appropriate and available option. Consequently, this bill in no way restricts an individual's due process rights nor limits their ability to contact us at our place of employment. In fact, I have been on the receiving end of harassing and threatening phone calls when the opinion I offered was upsetting to the individual calling. I believe this individual had and has every right to express their discontent, and situations such as these are risks I accept with the professional responsibility of the work I do. What I do not accept is the unnecessary risk placed upon me and those that I live with by having my private information made publicly available.

Finally, I also want to briefly mention one potential risk, in particular, of this bill not passing. Given that the primary means of accessing our private information is through voter registration records, the option of not registering to vote is currently the only means by which we could achieve what I believe is the appropriate and necessary standard of safety. It would certainly be an unfortunate shame to feel as though I had to make a choice between protecting myself and the people I love and exercising my civic duty to vote. I highlight this risk only to draw attention to the potential conundrum forensic examiners like myself will face. Please, do not allow this to be an option for consideration.

Thank you for your time. Please contact me if you have any questions.