

## **Presentation to Joint Legislative Administrative Procedure Oversight Committee**

Senator Hartsell, Representative Jordan, thank-you for the opportunity to speak. I am Reverend Dr. Lee Dukes, N.C. Certified Pastoral Counselor Number 4. I speak to affirm the continuation of certified pastoral counselors as part of the network of important mental health providers in our state. Certified pastoral counselors are counseling and therapy specialists who help clients from a variety of faith groups to deal with their mental health issues according to their own faith and values. All medical doctors and ministers do limited counseling. Like the psychiatrist is the mental health specialist to the medical community, the certified pastoral counselor is the mental health specialist to the religious community.

You have been provided a number of materials to show the adverse effects of proposed legislation to eliminate these religious professionals. I come with three points. Consent to share client material has been obtained and names are fictitious.

**Point One:** There is a core of knowledge for all counselors and therapists. Additionally, pastoral counseling has a distinct body of knowledge. This knowledge is seen as valuable by clients and other professionals.

When I was eighteen my career interests merged toward ministry and psychology. I told my Aunt, who had served as administrative secretary to a prominent medical doctor, that I was going to school to become a pastoral counselor. My Aunt said if I

became a psychiatrist I would make a lot more money. Seminary, three years of clinical residency and four degrees later, as a pastoral counselor I have not become rich. My Aunt was right. But, psychiatrists tell me that I have been able to work with clients who would never have entered their offices.

Holly is a counselor of another mental health specialty. Seeking care while going through divorce she sought my services because, (quote) “You bring the element of spirituality into the process, which is how I integrate and operate as a person. I would not work with anyone who did not have that special training.”

**Point Two:** Pastoral counselors are good for the economy. They operate small businesses and pay taxes. They have modest fees. They work regularly with the economically deprived and with the help of scholarship funds from churches they are able to offer modified fees.

Pastor Wilson leads a large congregation with many veterans of wars past and present. He has referred a number of these veterans to me because of my sensitivity to spiritual issues and my ability to work with modest fees. Client Ed states: (quote) “My work with the VA in PTSD has been helpful, but it did not get to the depth of shame and guilt I feel about my experiences. With no employment currently, I could not seek help from you without assistance from my church and your reduced fees.”

**Point Three:** Passage of this proposed legislation is the opposite of growth of our profession. It would shut it down. To be a counselor and therapist for fees in N.C., you must be certified or licensed.

At the board office over the past several months, we have had a number of inquiries from out-of-state persons on how to become a N.C. Certified Pastoral Counselor. Without Article 26, they cannot. Nor can the numbers of students across the state preparing themselves to become N.C. Certified Pastoral Counselors at this time.

N.C. Certified Pastoral Counselors do not need to be eliminated. They need to be encouraged to continue to grow. The citizens of N.C. need and deserve our valued contributions. Let us remember that N.C. was a national pioneer in establishing the first free-standing occupational board for certified pastoral counselors. Other states have followed our lead. I urge you to help us to move forward rather than backward. Thank-you for your attention and understanding.

Lee S. Dukes III, D.Min.  
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