

LEAD DEBATE ON THE BILL FOR AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE COUNSELLING PRACTITIONERS COUNCIL OF NIGERIA

This Bill seeks to establish the Counselling Practitioners Council of Nigeria for the conduct of qualifying examinations, regulating the counselling profession and determining standard of knowledge and skill required of persons seeking to become members of the Counselling Profession in Nigeria.

The Bill was first read on the floor of the Senate on the 1st of March, 2018

A professional counsellor is a highly trained individual who is able to use a different range of counselling approach with their client to resolve personal, social, or psychological problems and difficulties.

Counselling profession in the country is a practice that seeks to improve psychological wellbeing and mental health of our contemporary society. Professional counsellors are trained to counsel clients in trauma and abuse, addictions, family and relationships problems and many more.

Effective counselling reduces confusion by enabling the client to make informed decisions leading to positive changes in their attitude and or behaviour. The ultimate aim is to assist the client make their own choices, reach their own decisions and act upon them accordingly.

Professional Counsellors maintains professional relationships of trust that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals. Counsellors work with clients on strategies to overcome obstacles and personal challenges that they face.

The Counselling Association of Nigeria was founded on the 15th November, 1975 to ensure human psychological growth and development, and advancement of the counselling profession.

The Association is structured into Icons, Fellows, Associate members, honorary members, Full-time members and student membership who possesses the necessary requirements as stipulated in the Association constitution. And its membership cuts across all the states of the federation with 37 chapters.

The objective of this Professional Association is to assist individuals and corporate bodies to explore their environments, discover their strength and weaknesses, potentials, talents and skills, so as to determine their needs, set personal realistic goals, and adjusts suitably to achieve them in harmony with their environments.

Professional counselling services are needed in the following areas in the country:

1. Education
2. Politics
3. Vocational
4. Social-personal
5. Religious
6. Family
7. Economic
8. National Interest/Citizenship/Patriotism
9. Self-realisation
10. Harmonious co-existence;
11. Personal/National Security, among others.

The services rendered by Professional Counsellors attempt to reduce vices, enhance stability of the polity; ensure positive individual contributions to national growth and development thereby assisting in peaceful co-existence. To develop the nation, proper nurture and counselling of the individual is essential.

The Bill is a 20-paragraph legislative proposal with two schedules. It proposes the establishment of a Council that essentially determine the standard of knowledge to be acquired by persons seeking membership of the profession.

The Bill provides for membership of the Council; financial matters; and appointment of Registrar. Other vital provisions of the Bill include disciplinary powers of the Council; penalties for unprofessional conduct and offences.

The Bill would professionalise Counselling services as operated in other jurisdictions of the world, like in the UK where there is the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapist with over 44,000 members; American Counselling Association; and the Canadian Professional Counselling Association among others. This essentially would ensure the elimination of quackery, misinformation, and exploitation of citizens, as due process and decorum would be upheld.

The Bill would promote expertise and enhances confidence of members in the profession thereby maximising its national professional impact.

The Bill would enable the Council to define the scope and standards of training and practice for the counselling professions, drawing on evidence and experience, reflected in differentiated membership categories

The Bill would also enable the Council to prescribe and uphold the highest standard of practice of the counselling profession thereby ensuring the benefits of the profession.

CONCLUSION

Professional Counselling is well established profession in the country. Its impact on the psychological and national mental wellbeing of the society cannot be over-emphasised. It is therefore imperative that an articulate legislative instrument is provided to facilitate its very strategic objectives.

The Bill is simple and straightforward without any financial implication. I hereby urge my distinguished colleagues to support the second.