

Testimony
Senate Bill No.2079
Human Services Committee
Senator Lee Chairman
January 8, 2025

Chairman Lee, and members of the Human Services Committee, I am Dr. Shauna Eberhardt with the Department of Health and Human Services, Behavioral Health Division. I appear before you in support of Senate Bill No. 2079, which was introduced at the request of the Department.

The proposed changes in this Bill amend subsection 9 of section 25-01-01 of the North Dakota Century Code regarding the definition of Tier 2 mental health professional. The requested change would move "licensed professional counselors" to a Tier 2 status and remove them from the Tier 3 mental health professional definition in subsection 10. The rationale behind this request is a Licensed Professional Counselor has completed two years of direct clinical experience under the supervision of a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, have obtained a signed letter of recommendation from a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor supervisor, and are able to practice and bill independently in North Dakota. The difference between the Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor and Licensed Professional Counselor is the former must complete a minimum of 3,000 hours of experience and a national examination. This change would allow for increased flexibility in workforce for tasks designated to Tier 2 mental health professionals, such as the investigation and evaluation of petitions as outlined in section 25-03.1-08.

Under subsection 11 of section 25-01-01, a proposed addition of certified peer support specialist is requested for the definition of Tier 4 mental health professional. The department would like to recognize the professionalization of peer support as a necessary component of behavioral healthcare. Certified peer support specialists complete initial training related to their certification and must obtain ongoing training to maintain their certification. Peer support is a nationally-recognized service and is now considered a best practice in both mental health and substance use disorder treatment and recovery programs. Peer support does not replace current service or workforce, but rather supplements existing services by providing individuals with support through lived experience, reducing the stigma of behavioral health.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to try to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.