

February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Dear Senate Workforce Development Committee,

I am a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor in North Dakota, and have been licensed and practicing in North Dakota since 2021. I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 2357, which proposes the consolidation of multiple mental health licensing boards into one composite board. While I deeply respect the work of professionals in various mental health fields, I believe this proposal would undermine the integrity of each profession and introduce significant challenges for both practitioners and the state.

Each mental health discipline—psychology, counseling, social work, substance abuse counseling, and marriage and family therapy—has distinct educational requirements, ethical codes, licensure processes, and scopes of practice. A composite board would dilute the specialized knowledge and focus that each profession requires to effectively oversee licensing, complaints, and advocacy. This could lead to inconsistent oversight, reduced accountability, and a lack of nuanced understanding of issues specific to each profession.

Additionally, as mental health professions move toward licensure portability through compacts, a composite board could hinder the adoption and implementation of these agreements. For example, counselors are already in the process of integrating the counseling compact, and a single board could introduce competing system needs, potentially leading to noncompliance.

The consolidation of boards would also increase the time it takes to get licensed. Currently, counselors in North Dakota can obtain licensure in an average of 30 days. By contrast, similar processes in Minnesota can take 4-6 months. A composite board would significantly delay this process, impacting new professionals and increasing the financial burden on both licensees and the state. Additionally, costs would rise due to the need for expanded administrative support and system modifications to accommodate the different licensing requirements of each profession.

Finally, each of the current boards is effective in providing support and oversight to its practitioners. With over 3,500 mental health professionals in the state, a single board of 11 members would be insufficient to manage the needs of such a large and diverse group.

I respectfully ask you to reconsider the consolidation proposed in SB 2357, and I urge you to oppose this bill. By retaining the independence of each profession's licensing board, we can ensure continued effective oversight, support for professionals, and the highest standards of care for the citizens of North Dakota. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jamie Newberger".

Jamie Newberger, LPCC, NCC