

Prepared Testimony of the North Dakota Board of Marriage and Family Therapy

Testimony in Opposition to SB 2357

Chairman Wobbema and Members of the Committee:

This testimony is prepared on behalf of the North Dakota Board of Marriage and Family Therapists following a special meeting to discuss this bill. We, the board, are asking you to vote in opposition to SB 2357. Our board has multiple concerns over what moving towards a composite board would mean for the citizens of North Dakota to be outlined below.

1. Each Board is made up of separate and distinct professions. Although we each provide mental health services, the education, path to licensure, ethical codes, and foundations of practice vary dramatically. It would be a disservice to try to meld professions into a single board that have such varied pathways to each distinct field. We must preserve the boards to preserve the integrity of each profession, code of ethics, and ensure North Dakotans have the monitoring they deserve in regard to something as sacred as their mental health providers. SB 2357 would jeopardize this.
2. The composite board would create a scope of practice issue. As marriage and family therapists (MFTs) we are not able to advise on the other boards' procedures, processes, and competencies including but not limited to licensing process, disciplinary actions, and continued education management, nor can the other professions of ours. Thus making a composite board a misuse of board time.
3. Our boards are made up of volunteers that have expertise in the subject matter of the profession, statutes, and ethics in order to protect North Dakotans. To move into a composite board, specifically in the unreasonable amount of time in SB 2357, would place North Dakotans at risk with the volume of ethical and disciplinary issues to be managed by a single board with fewer subject matter experts of each distinct field.
4. Moreover, our ND MFT board does not cost the state any money, thus to disrupt this and other boards seems nonsensical paired with the above issues, and would put undue burden on the volunteers giving their time to boards to serve our state and our residents. Their focus should be able to remain on monitoring each profession to ensure North Dakotans have access to safe and ethical mental health services.
5. Although our professions may vary, our allied professions we consulted with are also in opposition of such for similar concerns of protecting the public, field preservation, and lack of similarity in board processes and regulations related to licensure. We all aim to serve North Dakotans, but please allow us to continue to do that in our unique routes of doing so.

We owe it to our board members to keep these efficient and inexpensive boards in place so that they can focus on keeping North Dakotans safe via their expertise in each unique professions' board versus creating increased chaos and rushed disarray by trying to meld boards that do not have the same professional ethics, statutes, and procedures. Please vote against SB 2357.

Respectfully,



Shauna Erickson-Abou Zahr M.S., LMFT on behalf of North Dakota Board of Marriage and Family Therapy

Vice President of the North Dakota Board of Marriage and Family Therapy