

**PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION FOR
MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPY**

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Statement of

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**On HB 2352
Before the House Professional Licensure Committee
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Good morning Chairman Sturla, Chairman Adolph, and members of the Committee. I appreciate this opportunity to present testimony on HB 2352 on behalf of the Pennsylvania Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.

My name is Dr. Sally Tice. I am a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and the Legislative Consultant for the Pennsylvania Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (PAMFT), a state division of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). AAMFT is the national professional association for the field of marriage and family therapy. It represents the professional interests of marriage and family therapists, leads the way in increasing understanding, research and education in the field and in ensuring that the public's needs are met by well-qualified practitioners.

The Pennsylvania Association for Marriage and Family Therapy is vitally interested in HB 2352. In an effort to provide greater protection to the citizens of Pennsylvania who are in need of mental health services, PAMFT pursued and succeeded in gaining licensure for Pennsylvania's marriage and family therapists in 1998. Licensure ensures a high standard of education and supervised experience for any licensed therapist that prospective clients might consult. PAMFT is concerned that HB 2352, a proposal to license individuals with only bachelor's level training, would confuse and mislead the public, create an added level of administrative oversight, and offer no additional protection to Pennsylvania citizens. We therefore speak against passage of this bill.

In order to clearly differentiate the group of licensed behavioral health professionals who have achieved a high level of *graduate* training from the group of human service workers who have only a *bachelor's* degree, it seems important to use distinctly different titles. Providing some form of "certification" for bachelor's level workers, rather than "licensure", would provide the needed clarity.

The proposed LSSW (Licensed Social Service Worker) designation is especially confusing. The similarity of the proposed LSSW title to the existing LSW (Licensed Social Worker) and LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker) titles would be extremely confusing for the public and could easily mislead them regarding the qualifications of a person providing services. Human Services Professional (HSP) would be a more distinctive designation.

The proposed LSSW title, its accompanying definition, and the requirements for the practice of social service work are very restrictive; HB 2352 attempts to bring all bachelor-level health service workers under a social work umbrella. Any new state certification process needs to be more inclusive of all professional orientations and use a title that is more generic as well. The proposed amendment to HB 2352 does provide a more generic title and a more inclusive definition. If this bill moves forward, the qualifications for licensure need to be similarly revised.

Passage of HB 2352 adds a new area of governmental oversight in the mental health field without providing any additional protection for the citizens of Pennsylvania. HB 2352 clearly states in Section 1 "Acquisition of a license under this act shall not be made a condition of the employment of a person by the Commonwealth or any of its political subdivisions or by nonprofit agencies." This sets up a licensure process, with all of the administrative requirements and expenses it would require, that could not be used by employers who hire human service workers. Why should the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania become involved in a licensure process that offers no benefit to its citizens?

Bachelor-level human service workers do provide many valuable services to the citizens of the Commonwealth. Developing a set of standards for these workers and providing some form of certification is a worthwhile and desirable endeavor. The public deserves the added protection this would provide. However, such an effort has far-reaching implications. In order to develop a realistic plan that could be phased in over time, all of the professional groups, institutions, and government departments affected by such a move need to collaborate and devise a comprehensive plan. HB 2352 does not represent this kind of thoughtful, collaborative effort.

With these concerns in mind, the Pennsylvania Association for Marriage and Family Therapists urges the House Professional Licensure Committee to take a stand *against* passage of HB 2352.

Thank you for this opportunity to share the views of the Pennsylvania Association for Marriage and Family Therapy.