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# RACHAEL A. CABRAL-GUEVARA

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STATE SENATOR • 19<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Licensing, Constitution and Federalism*

*Senator Rachael Cabral-Guevara*

*February 15, 2024*

Thank you committee members for allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 513, a straightforward bill targeted at improving access to mental health services and helping address the provider workforce shortage.

Wisconsin's mental health provider shortage should not be worsened by bureaucratic delays in getting professionals through the training process. This bill would not only assist with improving patient access, it will enable professionals to provide services they are trained to do.

Qualified treatment trainees (QTTs) can offer critical support to those in need. These trainees are supervised positions, utilized often to complete graduation and licensure requirements.

This bill would put these QTT positions in statute so that we can continue to benefit from the services they offer, especially in outpatient clinics. This includes clarification on providing psychotherapy, which is already permitted by administrative code for QTTs.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify on this important piece of legislation and I am hopeful you will support it.



February 15, 2024

**TO:** Senate Committee on Licensing, Constitution and Federalism

**FROM:** Mike Tierney, Legislative Liaison for the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services

**RE:** SB 513 related to provision of psychotherapy by qualified treatment trainees and applicants for certain training licenses in outpatient mental health clinics.

Chairperson Jacque and Committee members,

Thank you for holding this hearing today on Senate Bill 513.

While this legislation primarily affects a program under the jurisdiction of the Department of Health Services, there are issues with this legislation that have been identified by the Department of Safety and Professional Services.

We would ask that the bill be amended, beginning on page 2 line 4 and in subsequent places in the bill to remove the word "counseling" and insert "professional counseling". Graduate degrees are provided to individuals for various types of "counseling". We ask that this bill be amended to be consistent with degrees and occupational titles referenced under current law in Chapter 457 of the statutes. Not doing so could mislead a person with a graduate degree in some other type of counseling and give them false hope of being credentialed as a professional counselor.

The credential issued under s.457.09 is a Social Work Training Certificate (SWTC) that is issued to a person who per statute, "submits evidence satisfactory to the social worker section that he or she has a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in psychology, sociology, criminal justice or another human service program approved by the section." The Social Worker section is part of the Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Counseling and Social Work Examining Board (MPSW). A graduate degree is not required for a SWTC. It seems that the reference to s. 457.09 in the bill is incorrect.

How is a "closely related field" defined? We would request the removal of the wording "closely related field" as provisions of chapter 457 already establish the requirements for degree equivalency for credentialing. Again, the concern is giving false hope to an applicant and having someone who will never legally be able to receive a training license work as a QTT. Referencing chapter 457 provisions that require program equivalency would be preferable because ultimately, the individual is not going to be issued a training credential if they do not meet this statutory standard.

Providing the MPSW Board with the authority to promulgate rules around QTT, beyond conduct standards, would also provide some control over further defining the practice. Additionally, items such as prohibiting career QTTs, ensuring the QTTs have not been denied a license previously by the Board, etc could also be addressed by rule.

Thank you for your consideration.



TO: The Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Licensing, Constitution and Federalism  
FROM: Kathy Markeland, Executive Director  
DATE: February 15, 2024  
RE: Senate Bill 513 – Mental Health Qualified Treatment Trainees

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On behalf of the members of the Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies (WAFCA), thank you for considering our testimony for information on Senate Bill 513, which would permit post-graduate mental health trainee to provide psychotherapy while awaiting their training license from the Department of Safety and Professional Services.

WAFCA is a statewide network of non-profit and for-profit providers of human services and behavioral health treatment. For more than 40 years we have supported our member agencies in their missions to improve the lives of individuals, families and children in Wisconsin. Our members' services include an array of prevention, child welfare, mental health and substance use treatment services across the continuum of care. WAFCA member agencies employ hundreds of mental health therapists and are key partners in offering clinical supervision for new graduates pursuing their clinical hours toward full licensure.

Our members are acutely aware of the mental health needs in our Wisconsin communities, and we appreciate the efforts of the legislature to identify creative strategies to address the shortage of treatment professionals. We believe that SB 513 is a well-intentioned bill seeking to address a gap in mental health practice/billing that occurs when a master's level intern graduates from school and then awaits certification/licensure by DSPS. While WAFCA members are concerned about this "gap," we would note that the delay in DSPS licensure of new graduates has improved in recent months and we are concerned that SB 513 proposes to create additional processes requiring DSPS to re-deploy limited resources.

Of greater concern is that the bill creates a new statutory definition of "qualified treatment trainee" (QTT). QTT is not currently defined in the statutes and adding this definition could generate confusion. In essence, Section 4 of the bill creates a new type of psychotherapy practitioner (i.e. QTT). QTT is effectively a DHS Medicaid qualification status for certifying a practitioner as reimbursable under Medicaid.

In addition, the bill presumes that QTTs would only function in outpatient mental health clinics. "Outpatient mental health clinic" is a specific clinic certification under DHS 35. QTTs accrue their supervised practice hours in a wide array of settings including, schools, integrated health clinics, substance use treatment clinics, residential centers, hospitals and in community-based settings. As drafted, SB 513 appears to restrict the practice of QTTs to DHS 35 clinics which is inconsistent with the operational reality and would significantly reduce mental health treatment access.

Again, we appreciate efforts to streamline the certification and licensing processes in Wisconsin and appreciate the intention of the bill authors in bringing this proposal forward. We look forward to working with the authors and the Committee to identify impactful strategies to grow our future mental health workforce and better support the employers and agencies facilitating the development of emerging treatment professionals.