

RIMROCK



FOUNDATION

Leading Quality Addiction Treatment in the Northern Rockies

TESTIMONY HB 203

January 16, 2005

We have a serious workforce problem in Montana within the general healthcare industry and, in particular within the addiction treatment field. This bill before you today is one attempt to ease the shortage of Licensed Addiction Treatment Counselors. It will do this in two ways:

1. We propose to shorten the licensing examination process by omitting the oral examination that has followed the completion of a national written examination. The orals have greatly extended the time frame for obtaining licensure often meaning a counselor begins the licensure process and does not complete it for 18 months. The Dept. of Commerce also supports this change because addiction counselors are the only licensed group that have an oral examination procedure. All others have only a written examination. Further, the orals are costing more than the department is able to collect in fees. Because the oral examination has not been subjected to validation and reliability testing, we believe it to be a substandard measure of competence.
2. We are proposing a clarification of terms for the purpose of defining more more eligible degrees for applicants. Because the term "related" degree or field was never defined, the department has been requiring that applicants have only the few degrees named in the current law. The world has changed considerably in the last 15 years and degrees come by many different names. The clarifying definition we propose is intended to assure that any degree that is submitted can be evaluated against the specific criteria we have proposed and if found to have these courses, will serve to qualify the individual. This should expand the pool of candidates considerably for the addiction treatment programs in Montana without decreasing in any way the competence levels. The criteria we propose are similar to those currently used in the licenses of mental health professionals. This change was arrived at through a process of consensus by a task force established by the Department five years ago.

We urge your support of these changes and appreciate your sensitivity to our workforce problems.