

March 30, 2007

Opposition to SB434

Chairman Mendenhall and Members of the Business and Labor Committee:

My name is Dr. Alan Ostby. I am the immediate past president of the Montana Clinical Mental Health Counselors Association. I am here representing this organization, as well as myself.

Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors (LCPCs) are the largest group by far providers of mental health counseling in Montana. For the last three decades, LCPCs have a solid record of service to married couples and families, as well as individuals, in Montana.

Many of the counselors who want this MFT legislation are now LCPCs. I have respect for them as mental health practitioners.

However, we stand in opposition to the bill because it is completely unnecessary, is tantamount to licensing a modality, and would confuse the public as to who is most qualified to provide mental health services.

It is unnecessary: The people who want this bill are already able to be licensed and advertise their specialties in specific areas of counseling.

It is licensing a modality: There are many theoretical orientations in psychology. Research consistently shows that the most important curative factor is the ability to the counselor to form a therapeutic relationship with clients, rather than theoretical orientation. Lawyers and doctors have their general licenses and subspecialties. They do not separate licenses for each sub-specialty.

It would confuse the public: We challenge the implication that the proposed MFTs are any more qualified to treat married couples and families than are LCPCs. Many LCPCs have education and experience in family work that far exceeds the requirements for MFTs in this bill.

With regard to their desire to have a member on our state board, it is not equitable for MFTs to have a third of our representation on the board when they would have only a twentieth of our licensees. There are 800 LCPCs in the state, whereas there would be only about 40 MFTs.

Another problem with this bill is that many LCPCs who have completed MFT programs at Montana Universities would not qualify under that out-of-state specifications of this bill. You would be telling graduates of accredited MFT programs at Montana schools, such as MSU-Bozeman, that they cannot be licensed marriage and family therapists in Montana.

There are only about 40 people in Montana to whom this bill would currently apply. Does it make sense to create yet another layer of bureaucracy for so few, especially when they are already able to practice as mental health counselors with specialties in marriage and family?