

Dear Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee:

I am a full-time graduate student at the Family Therapy Program of Southern Connecticut State University; scheduled to graduate in December 2016. Thus far, my graduate coursework has consisted of the following topics: Gestalt Therapy, Family Systems Theory, Ethics, Clinical Practices, Couples Therapy, Substance Abuse, Psychopathology, and Diversity. Prior to completing my program I must satisfy a practical requirement of 500 clinical hours as a MFT Intern (MFT-I) and 100 hours of supervision by a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT).

I currently conduct therapy as a MFT Intern with individuals, couples, and families. I utilize the theories that I have learned in my graduate coursework along with the guidance of my supervisors to help people overcome their problems as their clinician. My training included supervision using a one-way mirror. When I have this type of live supervision, I am able to get guidance from my supervisor while doing therapy. Other forms of supervision include audio recording listening and progress note reviewing. In these instances, my work with a client is reviewed by a supervisor after the session, and then I get guidance from a supervisor on the case.

I currently work as a MFT intern clinician 5 days a week and meet with 3 supervisors each week, one supervisor per internship site. I intern at The Family Clinic at Southern Connecticut State University, The New Haven Children's District Probate Court, and Fairfield Counseling Services in Fairfield, CT. Given my experiences to date, I am confident in my ability to work as a therapist when I graduate because I am already doing the job, while under intense supervision. Even stronger than my self-assessment of abilities, I have been validated by the LMFTs who have served as my supervisors thus far.

*Despite this, I do worry about finding immediate employment after graduation due to my need to repay student loans and support my household. My future outlook is uncertain given the situation that I will be forced to endure a very limited job market until I am fully licensed. I currently follow ads for job offerings, and see that agencies prefer licensed MFTs; and many simply will not hire a MFT until they are licensed.*

In addition to maintaining my livelihood, I will have a need to acquire 1,000 hours for licensure before I can become a LMFT. My only option at the moment is to take a part-time job outside of marriage and family therapy as I work toward licensure. In being forced to work in another field as I accumulate hours, I am uncertain about the amount of time it will take me to get licensed; and I am afraid that I may have to abandon my career aspiration of becoming a LMFT, should I be financially required to find full time employment prior to beginning my career as a licensed therapist.

Given these concerns, I was very much inspired when I learned of this bill for the MFT Associate License (LMFTA). I believe that this is a critical first step that will support students and postgraduates like myself so that we can gain employment and achieve full licensure as quickly as possible. It will also create an avenue in mental healthcare for the proliferation of Marriage and Family Therapists and will provide more services to underserved populations in the State. With this LMFTA legislation being passed, I foresee the following for myself.

- Graduating in December 2016
- Sitting for the licensing exam in January 2017
- Being recognized as a LMFTA as soon as the law will allow

- Generating therapy related income as I accumulate 1,000 hours for licensure **while under supervision of a LMFT**
- Maintaining clients from internship sites for the sake of client care continuity (because clients prefer not to be passed around to different MFT interns who come and go)
- And becoming a LMFT within 1 to 1 ½ years.

The LMFTA is a safe and effective professional license because of the rigorous and stringent standards required for MFT programs to become accredited. All 5 programs in our state are fully accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE). Post graduate MFTs in Connecticut prove that they have the knowledge it takes to be licensed when they pass the licensing exam. I do believe that the 1,000 hours still holds significance in terms of differentiating the experience of a LMFTA from the more seasoned experience of the LMFT; however, in closing, it may be worthwhile to pay attention to the method in which a person attains their licensure. Consider a new LMFT who took 3 years to become licensed as they did therapy on a part time basis, versus a LMFTA who has recently finished 500 hours as a graduation requirement and has continued to practice on a full time basis and became a LMFT in a year. I believe that the LMFT who was licensed in one year and practiced on a full time basis, as a LMFTA, may have a stronger skillset than the LMFT who took 3 years to get licensed while working a part time job in another field.

For my sake, for the sake of the quality of the MFT profession, and for the sake of the people in our community who ask for our services, I urge you to pass this bill.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

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