

Georgia Occupational Regulation  
Review Council

House Bill 1599

*Marriage and Family Therapists*

LC 33 9142

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A Review of the Proposed Legislation

OCTOBER 2022

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# Executive Summary

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As provided in O.C.G.A. §43-1A, the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council (Council) reviews all bills proposing licensure of a profession or business referred to by the chair of the legislative committee of reference. Accordingly, the Council, at the request of the chair of the House Committee on Regulated Industries, has reviewed House Bill 1599, which implements certain changes to the requirements for licensure as a marriage and family therapist.

During the course of this review, Council staff obtained information from the bill sponsor and the applicant group. The Council also set aside time for public comment at meetings to hear from stakeholders.

O.C.G.A. §43-1A-6 requires the Council to consider certain criteria when determining the need for the regulation of a business or profession. For this review, the Council used these criteria to guide the development of findings related to the licensure and regulation of marriage and family therapists. The Council, with assistance from staff, developed the following findings during this review:

- ❖ **The practice of marriage and family therapists requires specialized skill or training.**  
Marriage and family therapists must meet certain accredited education requirements, attain certain degrees, and undergo supervised training, thereby meeting licensure requirements laid out in HB 1599.
- ❖ **Amending the requirements for marriage and family therapists would have a positive economic impact to the state.**  
Amending licensure requirements would put Georgia in line with national requirements and surrounding states. These changes will help attract and retain qualified individuals in the state. As a result, the citizens of Georgia would see an increase in the number of licensed therapists, increasing access to mental health services.

Based on these findings, the Council recommends HB 1599, LC 33 9142 pass as written. The Council approves of this recommendation by a vote of 6-0, with 3 members absent.

# Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council Membership

2022

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## **Standing Members**

## **Representing**

Meaghan Carver, Chairwoman

Office of Planning and Budget

Kelly Dudley

State Accounting Office

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Department of Agriculture

Georgia Steele

Department of Revenue

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Department of Natural Resources

Megan Andrews

Department of Public Health

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Office of the Secretary of State

## **Legislative Members**

Representative Ginny Ehrhart

Georgia House of Representatives

Senator Ed Harbison

Georgia State Senate

## Introduction

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House Bill 1599 sponsored by Chairman Powell proposes certain changes to the requirements for licensure as a marriage and family therapist (MFT). This report focuses on providing information concerning the nature of the legislation and presents an assessment on the need for these proposed changes.

In conducting this review, the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council, referred to as the Council for the remainder of this report, solicited input from any interested party that wished to submit information or participate in the process. The applicant group, the Georgia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, submitted a questionnaire through its representative, Elizabeth Appley. According to its website, the Georgia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy is a professional organization that supports the expertise and interests of marriage and family therapists in the state of Georgia. The questionnaire provided by the applicant group was helpful in presenting background information for this profession.

In addition, the Council reached out to other potentially interested groups, including the Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage Therapists; the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education; the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy; clinical professors; and university program directors. Council staff also performed additional analysis comparing the proposed changes in HB 1599 to the current requirements for marriage and family therapist licensure in all fifty states.

The Council provided representatives from interested parties with the opportunity to present information during Council meetings, either by verbal presentation and/or through written material. The Council posted meeting dates, times, and locations to the Office of Planning and Budget website (<https://opb.georgia.gov/georgia-occupational-regulation-review-council>).

## Description of Proposed Legislation

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HB 1599 amends Article 1 of Chapter 10A of Title 43 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated to propose certain changes to the required education and experience to be licensed as a marriage and family therapist in the state of Georgia. The bill provides for the following:

- ❖ Changes the coursework and practicum requirements for licensure as an associate marriage and family therapist to the requirements determined by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education;

- ❖ Changes the acceptable master's and Doctorate programs for licensure as a marriage and family therapist to those that are equivalent to a marriage and family therapy degree program by July 1, 2024;
- ❖ Changes the minimum hours of direct clinical experience for associate marriage and family therapists pursuing licensure as a marriage and family therapist from 2,000 hours to 1,500 hours;
- ❖ Changes the minimum hours of post-master's full-time direct clinical experience from 2,500 hours to 1,800 hours;
- ❖ Changes the minimum hours of post-master's full-time direct clinical experience for doctorate degree earners from 1,500 hours to 1,000 hours;

A summary of the bill can be found in Appendix A and a complete copy of the bill is located in Appendix B.

## Current Practices

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### *Definition of a Marriage and Family Therapist*

In the Official Code of Georgia Annotated Chapter 10A of Title 43, marriage and family therapy is defined as the specialty that evaluates, diagnoses, and treats emotional and mental conditions, whether cognitive, affective, or behavioral; resolves intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts; and changes perception, attitudes, and behavior; all within the context of marital and family systems<sup>1</sup>. The definition goes on to state that marriage and family therapy requires an applied understanding of the dynamics of marital and family systems, including individual psychodynamic; the use of assessment instruments that evaluate marital and family functioning; designing and recommending a course of treatment; and the use of psychotherapy and counseling. During council meetings, advocates highlighted that licensed marriage and family therapists can diagnose and treat mental illness; work in various units including individuals, couples, and families; and see patients in a wide age range.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics<sup>2</sup> (BLS) describes the work environment for marriage and family therapists as taking place in mental health centers and private practice facilities. BLS lists the median annual wage for marriage and family therapists as \$49,880 as of May 2021. BLS estimates that there are over 73,000 marriage and family therapists in the United States and that employment is expected to grow 16 percent from 2020 to 2030.

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<sup>1</sup> [O.C.G.A. § 43-10A-3](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/marriage-and-family-therapists.htm>

## *Education Requirements*

Currently, there are 123 marriage and family therapy programs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education; three of these programs are within the state of Georgia. Mercer University has a master's degree program in Marriage and Family Therapy on both the Macon and Atlanta campuses. The University of Georgia has a PhD Marriage and Family Therapy Program located on its Athens campus, and Valdosta State University has a master's degree program on its respective campus. Master's degree programs are typically 60 semester hours wherein 18 hours are part of a rigorous 12-month clinical practicum. Doctorate programs typically last three to five years depending on the level of education attained prior to matriculation. Some of the course subjects in marriage and family therapy degree programs include family systems theories, interventions, research in marriage and family therapy, legal issues, diagnosis, and professional ethics among others.

To be licensed as a marriage and family therapist in the state of Georgia, one must have attained a master's or doctorate degree in a marriage and family therapy program or an allied field with coursework in marriage and family therapy along with 2,500 hours of direct clinical experience for master's degree earners and 1,500 direct clinical experience for doctorate degree earners respectively. To achieve the required experience to be licensed as a marriage and family therapist, applicants tend to become licensed as an associate marriage and family therapist. The requirements for an associate marriage and family therapist include having a master's or doctorate degree in marriage and family therapy or an allied field with course work in marriage and family therapy. The experience required for associate marriage and family therapists include an internship/practicum of 500 hours of direct clinical experience and 100 hours of supervision.

## *Regulatory Body*

The Georgia Secretary of State's Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage Therapists are the current regulatory body for the profession of marriage and family therapists. The Board was created by the Georgia General Assembly in 1984. The main duties of the Board are as follows: conduct hearings, issue licenses, deny licensure, suspend licenses, revoke licenses, and to investigate those who have been licensed by the Board. The professions covered under the jurisdiction of this board are associate marriage and family therapists, marriage and family therapists, associate professional counselors, professional counselors, clinical social workers, and master social workers.

## Marriage and Family Therapist Licensure in Other States

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Research confirmed that all fifty states have some form of marriage and family therapist licensure. These different include licensed marriage and family therapists, associate marriage and family therapists, and marriage and family therapy counselors. Due to the scope of HB 1599 dealing with the licensure requirements specific to associate marriage and family therapists and marriage and family therapists, this state-by-state research focused mainly on the information pertaining to this bill.

Associate marriage and family therapists are only licensed in seventeen states. These states are Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, Texas, Utah, and Washington. In each of these states, the requirements to be licensed as an associate marriage and family therapist are the same requirements established to be licensed as a marriage and family therapist. The associate marriage and family therapist position is focused on allowing prospective applicants to gain the necessary experience to become a licensed marriage and family therapist following graduation from an accredited master's or doctoral degree program.

The largest difference between states is the minimum post-master's degree supervised practice. All states have at least a one-thousand hour minimum of post-master's degree experience. The state with the largest number of hours needed for licensure is Utah and Virginia with a minimum of 4,000 hours of experience. Every state requires a master's or doctoral degree in marriage and family therapy, however the wording differs state to state. Connecticut, Idaho, Kentucky, Montana, North Carolina, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington require annual renewal of marriage and family therapists' licenses. Hawaii and New York are the only states that require renewal of marriage and family therapists' licenses after three years. The other forty states require biennial renewal of marriage and family therapists' licenses.

## The Issue and Potential for Harm

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In August 2021, The Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education published version 12.5 of their accreditation standards<sup>3</sup>, reducing the number of clinical contact hours and supervision hours required by including only direct contact hours and by excluding documentation hours in the total hours needed for licensure. Additionally, specific courses outlined in the Official Code of Georgia Annotated were found to be outdated compared to the current educational needs outlined in the updated standards. HB 1599 was introduced to address these changes and consolidate requirements for educational institutions while maintaining the standard of care.

In December 2021, the House Rural Development Council (RDC) published their final recommendations<sup>4</sup> for increasing access to public health for rural Georgia. As part of their study, the RDC found that Georgia's mental health professional licensure requirements were greater than in surrounding states, impacting the number of licensed professionals in the state. As seen in Table 1, the states of Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas have more active marriage and family licensees compared to Georgia. RDC's recommendation was to instruct licensing boards regulating mental health professionals to review existing requirements, reform them to allow for the

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<sup>3</sup>[https://coamfte.org/documents/COAMFTE/Accreditation%20Resources/COAMFTE%20Standards%20Version%2012.5%20-%20Published%20August%202021%20-%208.26.21%20\(with%20links\).pdf](https://coamfte.org/documents/COAMFTE/Accreditation%20Resources/COAMFTE%20Standards%20Version%2012.5%20-%20Published%20August%202021%20-%208.26.21%20(with%20links).pdf)

<sup>4</sup>[https://www.house.ga.gov/Documents/CommitteeDocuments/2021/Rural\\_Development\\_Council/Final\\_Recommendations.pdf](https://www.house.ga.gov/Documents/CommitteeDocuments/2021/Rural_Development_Council/Final_Recommendations.pdf)



placements of professionals, and submit any necessary code changes to the General Assembly. It is believed that by changing these requirements, Georgia may see growth in licensed marriage and family therapists, and therefore increase access to mental health care.

**Table 1: Active Licenses by State**

State	Active Licensees
Georgia	1,074
Alabama	438
Florida	2,904
Louisiana	1,281
Mississippi	108*
North Carolina	1,398
South Carolina	313*
Tennessee	1,650
Texas	2,979
Virginia	1,002*

\*Figures were gathered from the George Washington University Database which uses unduplicated data. All other figures were sourced from state licensure websites.

## Findings

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Pursuant to O.C.G.A. § 43-1A-6, the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council must review bills under their consideration according to the following criteria:

- ❖ Whether the unregulated practice of the occupation may harm or endanger the health, safety, and welfare of citizens of this state and whether the potential for harm is recognizable and not remote;
- ❖ Whether the practice of the occupation requires specialized skill or training and whether the public needs and will benefit by assurances of initial and continuing occupational ability;
- ❖ Whether the citizens of this state are or may be effectively protected by other means;
- ❖ Whether the overall cost effectiveness and economic impact would be positive for citizens of this state; and
- ❖ Whether there are means other than state regulation to protect the interests of the state.

Based on this set of criteria, the Council has reviewed HB 1599, which proposes certain changes to the requirements for licensure as a marriage and family therapist. In doing so, the Council developed the following findings:

- ❖ The practice of marriage and family therapists requires specialized skill or training.

Marriage and family therapists must meet certain accredited education requirements, attain degrees through accredited programs, and undergo supervised training, thereby meeting licensure requirements laid out in HB 1599.

- ❖ Amending the requirements for marriage and family therapists would have a positive economic impact to the state.  
Amending licensure requirements would put Georgia in line with national requirements and surrounding states. These changes will help attract and retain qualified individuals in the state. As a result, the citizens of Georgia would see an increase in the number of licensed therapists, increasing access to mental health services and providing a positive economic impact to the state.

## Recommendation

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Based on these findings, the Council recommends HB 1599, LC 33 9142 pass as written. The Council approves of this recommendation by a vote of 6-0, with 3 members absent.

## Appendix A: Summary of Proposed Legislation

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### **Summary of HB 1599**

- This bill would revise subsection (a) of Code Section 43-10A-13, relating to requirements for licensure in marriage and family therapy.
- Associate Marriage and Family Therapists Requirements
  - This bill changes the required coursework for licensure as an associate marriage and family therapist to the coursework determined by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education.
  - The bill would also change the practicum requirement for licensure as an associate marriage and family therapist to meet the minimum number of direct clinical contact hours and supervision hours determined by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education.
- Marriage and Family Therapists Requirements
  - Previous Associate Marriage and Family Therapists:
    - This bill changes the minimum hours of direct clinical experience to be eligible for licensure as a marriage and family therapist from 2,000 hours to 1,500 hours.
  - Master's Degree Earners:
    - This bill specifies which master's programs are allowed for this licensure by requiring that by July 1, 2024, all acceptable degree programs will have to include courses equivalent to those of a marriage and family therapy degree program.
    - The bill changes the minimum hours of post-master's full-time direct clinical experience from 2,500 hours to 1,800 hours. This meets the minimum number of direct clinical hours set by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy.
  - Doctorate Degree Earners:
    - This bill specifies which doctorate programs are allowed for this licensure by requiring that by July 1, 2024, all acceptable doctorate degree programs or additional post-master's degree coursework will have to include courses equivalent to those of a marriage and family therapy degree program.
    - The bill changes the minimum hours of post-master's full-time direct clinical experience for doctorate degree earners from 1,500 hours to 1,000 hours. This meets the minimum number of direct clinical hours set by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy.

## Appendix B: Complete Text of House Bill 1599 (LC 33 9142)

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### A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

### AN ACT

1 To amend Article 1 of Chapter 10A of Title 43 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,  
2 relating to licensing provisions regarding professional counselors, social workers, and  
3 marriage and family therapists, so as to revise provisions relating to education, experience,  
4 and training requirements for licensure in marriage and family therapy; to provide for related  
5 matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

#### 7 SECTION 1.

8 Article 1 of Chapter 10A of Title 43 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to  
9 licensing provisions regarding professional counselors, social workers, and marriage and  
10 family therapists, is amended by revising subsection (a) of Code Section 43-10A-13, relating  
11 to requirements for licensure in marriage and family therapy, as follows:

12 "(a) The education, experience, and training requirements for licensure in marriage and  
13 family therapy are as follows:

14 (1) For licensure as an associate marriage and family therapist, a master's degree in from  
15 a program in marriage and family therapy or a program including a master's degree and  
16 additional post-master's degree coursework, both of which programs shall include ~~three~~  
17 ~~courses in marriage and family studies, three courses in marriage and family therapy,~~  
18 ~~three courses in human development, one course in marriage and family therapy ethics,~~  
19 ~~and one course in research~~ coursework as set forth on July 1, 2022, by the Commission  
20 on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education, or from any program  
21 accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy  
22 Education, which degree shall have been granted by a recognized educational institution;

23 completion of a one-year practicum in marriage and family therapy under supervision  
24 before or after the granting of the master's degree, which practicum shall ~~include 500~~  
25 ~~hours of direct clinical experience in marriage and family therapy and 100 hours of~~  
26 ~~supervision of such experience~~ meet the minimum number of direct clinical contact hours  
27 and supervision hours as set forth on July 1, 2022, by the Commission on Accreditation  
28 for Marriage and Family Therapy Education; and registration with the board of an  
29 acceptable contract for obtaining the post-master's experience under direction and  
30 supervision required for licensure as a marriage and family therapist; and  
31 (2) For licensure as a marriage and family therapist:  
32 (A) Licensure as an associate marriage and family therapist and two years of full-time  
33 post-master's experience or its equivalent in the practice of marriage and family therapy  
34 under direction and supervision as an associate marriage and family therapist, which  
35 shall include a minimum of ~~2,000~~ 1,500 hours of direct clinical experience and 100  
36 hours of supervision of such experience and which shall be completed within a period  
37 of not less than two years and not more than five years;  
38 (B) A master's degree from:  
39 (i) A a program in any specialty marriage and family therapy;  
40 (ii) A program in clinical counseling, clinical social work, any allied profession,  
41 applied child and family development, or applied sociology,; provided, however, that,  
42 ~~on and after July 1, 2024, any such degree program or additional post-master's degree~~  
43 coursework shall include courses equivalent to those of a marriage and family therapy  
44 degree program; or  
45 (iii) Any from any program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for  
46 Marriage and Family Therapy Education,  
47 which degree shall have been granted by a recognized educational institution, and shall  
48 include, as part of the degree program or as additional post-master's degree coursework,

49 ~~at least two courses in marriage and family studies, two courses in marriage and family~~  
50 ~~therapy, and, after July 1, 2000, one course in marriage and family therapy ethics; and~~  
51 three years' full-time post-master's experience or its equivalent under direction and  
52 supervision in the practice of any specialty, which shall include a minimum of ~~2,500~~  
53 1,800 hours of direct clinical experience, one year of which may have been in an  
54 approved practicum before or after the granting of the master's degree which shall  
55 ~~include a minimum of 500 hours of direct clinical experience~~ meet the minimum  
56 number of direct clinical contact hours and supervision hours as set forth on July 1,  
57 2022, by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy  
58 Education, and two years of which shall have been in the practice of marriage and  
59 family therapy which shall include a minimum of ~~2,000~~ 1,500 hours of direct clinical  
60 experience, and 200 hours of supervision of such experience all of which shall be  
61 completed within a period of not less than three years and not more than five years; or  
62 (C) A doctorate degree from:  
63 (i) A a program in any specialty marriage and family therapy;  
64 (ii) A program in clinical counseling, clinical social work, any allied profession,  
65 applied child and family development, or applied sociology; provided, however, that,  
66 on and after July 1, 2024, any such doctorate degree program or additional  
67 post-master's degree coursework shall include courses equivalent to those of a  
68 marriage and family therapy degree program; or  
69 (iii) Any from any program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for  
70 Marriage and Family Therapy Education,  
71 which degree shall have been granted by a recognized educational institution; and shall  
72 include, as part of a master's or doctoral degree program or as additional postgraduate  
73 degree coursework, at least two courses in marriage and family studies, two courses in  
74 marriage and family therapy, and, after July 1, 2000, one course in marriage and family

75 ~~therapy ethics~~; two years' full-time post-master's experience under direction in the  
76 practice of marriage and family therapy which shall include a minimum of ~~1,500~~ 1,000  
77 hours of direct clinical experience, one year of which may have been in an approved  
78 internship program before or after the granting of the doctoral degree, which shall  
79 ~~include a minimum of 500 hours of direct clinical experience~~ meet the minimum  
80 number of direct clinical contact hours and supervision hours as set forth on July 1,  
81 2022, by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy  
82 Education, and one year of which shall have been full-time post-master's experience,  
83 which shall include a minimum of ~~1,000~~ 700 hours of direct clinical experience; and  
84 100 hours of supervision of such experience in the practice of marriage and family  
85 therapy, 50 hours of which may have been obtained while a student or intern in an  
86 accredited doctoral program."

87 SECTION 2.

88 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.



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# The University of Georgia

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College of Family & Consumer Sciences  
*Department of Human Development and Family Science*

September 1, 2022

Meaghan Carver  
Chairwoman  
Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council  
Governor's Office of Planning and Budget  
2 Capitol Square  
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Chairwoman Carver and Members of the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council,

As a faculty member actively engaged in training doctoral students enrolled in the The Marriage and Family Therapy doctoral program at the University of Georgia, I welcomed the opportunity to provide support on House Bill 1599. The proposed legislation would amend Georgia law relating to licensing provisions regarding professional counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists so as to revise provisions relating to education, experience, and training requirements for licensure as a marriage and family therapist to be consistent with the standards set forth by the national accrediting body, the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education [COAMFTE].

As a current Board member and Past-President of the Georgia Association of Marriage and Family Therapy [GAMFT], a practicing clinician (GA LMFT #1082 LPC #4356), and doctoral program faculty member, I was actively involved in the ad hoc Legislative committee dedicated to the review of existing legislation governing the education, experience, and training requirements for marriage and family therapists in Georgia.

As the only campus-based doctoral program in Georgia, we support the efforts included in HB 1599 to move away from extremely prescriptive legislative language dictating the exact type of coursework and number of practicum hours. Amending the requirements to be commensurate with the national accrediting organization [COAMFTE], will provide an incentive to graduates of the doctoral program to retain their practices in Georgia to increase the number of highly trained mental health providers in across the state. Doctoral students engage in advanced training in which their ratio of supervision hours to client hours are almost equivalent, resulting in highly competent clinicians who a depth of knowledge in particular areas. For example, the doctoral program at UGA specializes in the treatment of trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress, including intergenerational trauma; all of which are easily identified as needs across Georgia.



Thank you for the opportunity to express my support of HB 1599, and your commitment to the well-being of Georgia residents. I appreciate your time and efforts. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JGonyea PhD LMFT". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer LJ Gonyea, PhD LMFT LPC  
Associate Clinical Professor  
AAMFT Approved Supervisor



Ms. Meaghan Carver  
Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council  
Governor's Office of Planning and Budget  
2 Capitol Square  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Re: GORRC Review of HB 1599 regarding Licensure Requirements for Marriage and Family Therapists

Dear Members of the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council:

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness Georgia (NAMI Georgia) in support of [HB 1599](#). NAMI Georgia seeks to create communities where all affected by mental illnesses find hope, help, and acceptance through support, education and advocacy. We work to increase non-discriminatory access to quality healthcare, housing, education and employment for people with mental illness, educate the public about mental illness, eliminate the stigma of mental illness, and increase funding for research into the causes and treatment of mental illness.

Working in partnership with a broad coalition of consumer advocates, healthcare professionals and providers through the Georgia Mental Health Policy Partnership (GMHPP) we worked hard to increase access to mental health care for Georgians with the successful passage of HB 1013 this year. There is much work that remains to be done. This year, Georgia was ranked 48<sup>th</sup> in the country in access to mental health care.

The recommendation of the [House of Representatives Rural Development Council 2021 Report](#) (see p. 12) suggests increasing access to mental health care by addressing the licensure requirements for mental health providers and bringing them in line with the requirements in surrounding states in the southeast. HB 1599 seeks to achieve this goal for marriage and family therapists in a way that preserves professional standards and patient safety.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized initials and a long horizontal flourish.

Kim H. Jones

Executive Director

NAMI Georgia



September 7, 2022

Meaghan Carver  
Chairwoman  
Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council  
Governor's Office of Planning and Budget  
2 Capitol Square  
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Chairwoman Carver and Members of the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council,

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) thanks you for the opportunity to provide testimony and support on House Bill 1599, legislation that would amend Georgia law relating to licensing provisions regarding professional counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists so as to revise provisions relating to education, experience, and training requirements for licensure as a marriage and family therapist.

AAMFT is the national association representing the professional interests of more than 73,000 licensed marriage and family therapists (MFTs) who provide essential behavioral health services to individuals and families throughout the United States, including the approximately 1,190 LMFTs and Associate MFTs practicing in Georgia.

AAMFT supports the effort to update the current MFT educational and post graduate direct clinical experience requirements contained in OCGA §43-10A-13. Furthermore, AAMFT supports the efforts included in HB 1599 to move away from extremely prescriptive legislative language dictating the exact type of coursework required. The approach outlined in HB 1599, of instead allowing for coursework to fall in line with the requirements set forth by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) national accrediting agency for marriage and family therapy education and training, is vital to helping mental health professionals move forward and address increasing provider shortages across the country. This approach also helps make Georgia MFT programs competitive and ensures Georgia's educational licensure requirements align with broadly accepted national standards.

This bill also includes a reduction in the required hours for licensure. If enacted, post-master's MFTs will complete a minimum of 1,500 hours of direct clinical experience, rather than the current 2,000 hours of required experience. Reducing the number of direct clinical hours required eases the burden on trainees and remains in line with current trends throughout the southeast. Currently, all of the states that neighbor Georgia require between 1,000 and 1,500 direct clinical hours, so this proposed change is in line with regional norms.

Furthermore, this proposal makes sense given that the definition of direct clinical hours was revised in the COAMFTE Accreditation Standards Version 12.5 that went into effect at the

beginning of 2022. The changes proposed by HB 1599 will bring Georgia's practicum requirement from 500 to 300 hours due to changes in the way those hours are measured in the Version 12.5 standards. The change from measuring 500 hours of "direct clinical experience" to 300 hours of "direct clinical contact hours" does not result in a reduction of meaningful clinical experience. COAMFTE's new standards state that "direct clinical contact" hours are limited to the time spent in therapy with clients and cannot include "telephone contact, case planning, observation of therapy, record keeping, training, role-playing, travel, administrative activities, consultation with community members or professionals, or MFT relational/systemic supervision." Some of these activities could be included under the "direct clinical experience" definition, so reducing the number of practicum hours makes sense given this definitional change.

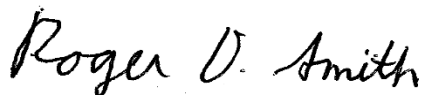
These changes are beneficial for the MFT profession a whole, as it will ease some of the burden on new entrants into the profession, thus increasing the number of mental health professionals available to Georgia residents. Furthermore, by aligning state standards with the national accrediting organization's requirements, HB 1599 will preserve and protect the quality of the MFT profession across the state of Georgia.

Thank you for the opportunity to express AAMFT's support of HB 1599, and your commitment to the mental health professions in Georgia. We greatly appreciate your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Patricia C. Barton  
Government Affairs Manager  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy



Roger D. Smith  
Director of Government and Corporate Affairs and General Counsel  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy



September 7, 2022

Ms. Meaghan Carver  
Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council  
Governor's Office of Planning and Budget  
2 Capitol Square  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Re: GORRC Review of HB 1599 on Licensure Requirements for Marriage and Family Therapists

Dear Members of the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council:

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Georgia Chapter (NASW-GA), regarding our support of [HB 1599](#). NASW-GA is a chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the world's largest professional social work organization, with 120,000 members nationwide, over 2,200 of which are members of the NASW Georgia Chapter. NASW-GA, like NASW, works to enhance its members' professional growth and development, create and maintain professional standards, and advance sound social policies. NASW-GA promotes the image and interests of professional social workers and the people served by them in the state of Georgia. Georgia's social workers practice in various settings, including family service agencies, community mental health centers, hospitals, employee assistance programs, schools, and public and private agencies.

The recommendation of the House of Representatives Rural Development Council 2021 Report (see p. 12) suggests increasing access to mental health care by addressing the licensure requirements for mental health providers and bringing them in line with the requirements in surrounding states in the southeast. HB 1599 seeks to achieve this goal for marriage and family therapists in a way that preserves professional standards and patient safety. The bill also seeks to update the standards for education coursework in a way that is consistent with national accreditation standards. This too eases access to licensure for marriage and family therapists who want to come here from other states and increases access to care.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cheryl Bonneau".

Cheryl Bonneau, JD, MSW  
NASW-GA Executive Director  
Email: [exec.naswga@socialworkers.org](mailto:exec.naswga@socialworkers.org)



09/07/2022

Meaghan Carver, Chairwoman  
Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council  
Governor's Office of Planning and Budget  
2 Capitol Square  
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Chairwoman Carver and Members of the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council:

Valdosta State University's Marriage and Family Therapy Program thanks you for the opportunity to provide support on Georgia House Bill 1599. This legislation would revise provisions that relate to the education, experience, and training requirements for Marriage and Family Therapists by amending the current law that establishes licensing provisions for Georgia's mental health professionals, which include professional counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists.

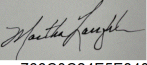
The VSU [Marriage and Family Therapy Program](#) has been a [COAMFTE \(Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education\)](#) accredited program since 2006. During this time, we have graduated more than 450 highly trained, skilled Marriage and Family Therapists, a high percentage of which seek and [achieve licensure](#) in Georgia. Ensuring that we continue to license Marriage and Family Therapists in Georgia is essential, particularly given the [shortage of mental health professionals](#) in our state.

The VSU Marriage and Family Therapy program supports the effort, outlined in HB 1599, to match Georgia state licensing requirements with the educational practice requirements set forth by [COAMFTE](#). Such a change would help address the increasing provider shortages across the country. Furthermore, without compromising training and education, this legislative change would be of significant benefit to the MFT profession as a whole, as it will ease the burden currently shouldered by new licensure candidates as they move from training to professional employment. This will ultimately provide a meaningful increase in the number of mental health professionals available to Georgia residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support of HB 1599. We greatly appreciate your time and consideration to this important issue. If I can be of further assistance regarding this

matter, please do not hesitate to call me or my colleague, [Dr. Jennifer Lambert-Shute](#).

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:  
  
766C0C24E5E8407...

[Martha Laughlin, Ph.D.](#)

Professor and [Family Therapy Program Director](#)

Valdosta State University

Office: (229) 249-4961

Fax: (229) 293-6265

[Marriage and Family Therapy Program](#) at [Valdosta State University](#)

903 North Patterson Street ♦ Valdosta, GA 31698

**Phone** (229) 219-1281 ♦ **Fax** (229) 293-6265



September 7, 2022

Meaghan Carver  
Chairwoman  
Georgia Occupational Regulation Review  
Council Governor's Office of Planning & Budget  
2 Capitol Square  
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Chairwoman Carver and Members of the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council,

As a faculty member actively engaged in training master's degree students enrolled in the Master of Family Therapy (MFT) training program at Mercer University's School of Medicine, I highly support the efforts on House Bill 1599. The proposed legislation would amend Georgia law relating to licensing provisions regarding professional counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists so as to revise provisions relating to education, experience, and training requirements for licensure as a marriage and family therapist to be consistent with the standards set forth by the national accrediting body, the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE).

As a current GAMFT Board member and Past-President of the Georgia Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (GAMFT), a practicing clinician (GA LMFT #001206), and master's degree program faculty member, I am an active member of the ad hoc Legislative committee dedicated to the review of existing legislation governing the education, experience, and training requirements for marriage and family therapists in Georgia.

As one of only two campus-based COAMFTE accredited master's level programs in Georgia, we support the efforts included in HB 1599. First, HB1599 will help move away from the outdated legislative language regarding required coursework, which no longer aligns with COAMFTE coursework requirements. We also support changing the practicum clinical requirements in the state regulatory standards in order to match with the more recent criteria set forth by Version 12.5 of COAFMTE standards. HB1599 would ease the challenges faced by master's degree programs in meeting both current sets of standards and would create more streamlined language between COAMFTE standards and state regulatory standards. In turn, master's degree programs can focus on meeting one set of aligned standards in order to maintain quality education/training and preparation for licensure.



Thank you for the opportunity to express my support of HB 1599, and your commitment to the well-being of Georgia residents. I appreciate your time and efforts. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Andrea S. Meyer Stinson".

Andrea S. Meyer Stinson  
Associate Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences/Pediatrics  
Mercer University School of Medicine



Ms. Meaghan Carver  
Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council  
Governor's Office of Planning and Budget  
2 Capitol Square  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Re: GORRC Review of HB 1599 on Licensure Requirements for Marriage and Family Therapists

Dear Members of the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council:

I am writing to you on behalf of Georgia Society for Clinical Social Workers (GSCSW) in support of [HB 1599](#). GSCSW is a state-wide organization of professional social workers dedicated to the advancement of clinical social work practice. The purpose of this organization shall be to advance and promote the practice of Clinical Social Work by 1) participating in the legislative process, both state and national; 2) promoting the profession of Clinical Social Work and collaborating with similar mental health professions; and 3) increasing and disseminating knowledge through research, meetings, educational programs, professional contacts, mentorship, reports, papers, discussions, and publications.

The recommendation of the [House of Representatives Rural Development Council 2021 Report](#) (see p. 12) suggests increasing access to mental health care by addressing the licensure requirements for mental health providers and bringing them in line with the requirements in surrounding states in the southeast. HB 1599 seeks to achieve this goal for marriage and family therapists in a way that preserves professional standards and patient safety. The bill also seeks to update the standards for education coursework in a way that is consistent with national accreditation standards. This too eases access to licensure for marriage and family therapists who want to come here from other states and increases access to care.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Nancy L. Acevedo, LCSW  
GSCSW Legislative Co-Chair