



## THE WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY

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1300 W. Nickerson St. #128, Seattle, WA 98119

wamft@wamft.org

206.450.8931

### 2023 Legislative Priorities

#### **WAMFT Supports:**

[SB 5481](#) - Concerning the uniform telemedicine act.

Prime Sponsor: Cleveland D-49

This bill authorizes a healthcare practitioner (including MFTs) to provide telehealth services compliant with current professional practice standards and laws, and comparable to in-person health care standards. This adds a new chapter to Title 18 RCW. We support this bill as it aligns with our goals for modernizing MFT licensure law.

[HB 1503](#) - Collecting health care professionals' information at the time of license application and license renewal.

Prime Sponsor: Riccelli D-3

This bill is related to the collection of health care professionals' information at the time of license application and renewal and adds a new section to RCW 18.130. The bill requires that applicants provide race, ethnicity, gender, languages spoken, provider specialty, and primary and secondary practice location at time of application and at each renewal. We support this bill as it aligns with our goals for modernizing MFT licensure law and highlights potential pathways for increased diversity, equity, and inclusion, with the goal of creating a more equitable healthcare system. We recommend that an opt-out option be available and that the individual licensee be separated from their DEI information to maintain individual privacy. In addition, we would like more details on the logistics around data utilization and storage.

[HB 1348 \(SB 5189\)](#) - Establishing behavioral health support specialists.

Prime Sponsor: Callan D-5; Trudeau D-27

The Department of Health is partnering with the University of Washington to develop a behavioral health support specialist clinical training program, characterized by brief, evidence-based interventions delivered to the intensity and expected duration of the behavioral health problem. The approach features routine outcome monitoring and regular, outcome-focused supervision. Use of behavioral health support specialists in Washington is expected to improve access to behavioral health services and ease workforce shortages while helping behavioral health professionals work at the top of their scope of practice. We understand the importance of increasing the behavioral health workforce and similarly to the peer specialist legislation, we urge policymakers to adopt effective short- and long-term strategies to create greater sustainability for masters- and doctoral-level clinicians in order to retain a highly-credentialed behavioral health workforce.

[HB 1394](#) - Creating a developmentally appropriate response to youth who commit sexual offenses.

Prime Sponsor: Senn D-41

This bill reforms juvenile sex offender registration policy and related areas. The bill requires Sex Offender Treatment Providers (SOTP) and Sex Offender Treatment Provider Affiliates (SOTPA) to maintain dual licensure – primary licensure in a qualifying behavioral health profession and secondary licensure as an SOTP/SOTPA. The bill expands the list of qualifying primary credentials to include licensed counselor associates (Mental Health Counselor Associates, Marriage and Family Therapy Associates, Independent Clinical Social Workers Associates, and Advanced Social Work Associates). These credentials were valid underlying credentials until they were inadvertently removed from the statute in 2020 legislation.

[SB 5179](#) - Increasing access to the provisions of the Washington death with dignity act.

Prime Sponsor: Pedersen

This bill intends to increase access to the provisions of the Washington death with dignity act and amends and adds a chapter to RCW 70.245. MFTs were not included as a medicare provider until recent legislation and as a result were not originally included as a provider listed under this act. WAMFT supports this bill and requests the current bill be amended to include all mental health professionals, including MFTs.

## **WAMFT Concerned:**

[SB 5555](#) - Addressing the behavioral health workforce shortage and expanding access to peer services by creating the profession of certified peer specialists

Prime Sponsor: Randall D-26

This bill has been revived in the 2023 Legislative Session. WAMFT believes that the scope of practice for peer specialists should be thoughtfully defined in order to delineate where an individual with lived experience but not masters-level training should fit in the continuum of care. WAMFT has recommended that if this legislation is allowed to go forward, the role must be aligned with existing best practice, nested within a care team rather than provided as a standalone service, and supported by comprehensive training that includes cultural attunement, self-of-the-provider awareness, and trauma-informed care. In addition, WAMFT is advocating that policymakers adopt effective short- and long-term strategies to create greater sustainability for masters- and doctoral-level clinicians in order to retain a highly credentialed behavioral health workforce.

[SB 5585](#) - Allowing licensed and certified behavioral health agencies to designate certain individuals as mental health professionals.

Prime Sponsor: Braun R-20

This bill allows licensed and certified behavioral health agencies to designate certain individuals as mental health professionals and amends the RCW and adds new sections. It allows a person employed by the agency to be a mental health professional if the person holds a bachelor's degree in counseling or one of the social sciences and has at least five years of experience in direct treatment of persons with a mental disorder, experience gained under the supervision of a mental health professional recognized by the department or attested to by the behavioral health agency. We have concerns about this bill as it increases the scope of bachelor-level professionals. We recommend strengthening and subsidizing existing masters and doctoral paths to behavioral health licensure, and incentivizing and retaining highly trained clinicians.

## **Monitoring:\***

[HB 1134](#) Implementing the 988 behavioral health crisis response and suicide prevention system.

Prime Sponsor: Orwall D-33

Relevant Goal: Mental health crisis response

WAMFT retains interest in aspects of 988 implementation having to do with cultural attunement, collaboration with law enforcement, and incorporation of peer specialists into the continuum of care.

[HB 1021](#) ([SB 5354](#)) - Aligning social worker licensing requirements.

Prime Sponsor: Thai D-41 / Trudeau D-27

This bill intends to align licensing standards more closely to those articulated by the national association of social workers, the association of social work boards, and the forthcoming interstate compact on social work licensing.