



## **Recommendations to the BHRIC Workforce Committee - Workforce and Systems Development Subcommittee Addressing Barriers to Licensure**

The following recommendations identify and address barriers to licensing of Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs) and Associate Marriage and Family Therapists (AMFTs) by the Georgia Secretary of State's Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage Therapists.

### **Background**

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. 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. Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs) can diagnose and treat mental illness; work in various units including individuals, couples, and families; and see patients in a wide age range.

To be licensed as a Marriage and Family Therapist in the state of Georgia, one must have earned 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 having passed a national licensing exam and completed 2,500 hours of directed and supervised clinical experience for master's degree earners, or 1,500 hours for doctorate degree recipients. To achieve the required experience to be licensed as a Marriage and Family Therapist, new therapists are encouraged to pursue pre-licensed credentialing as an Associate Marriage and Family Therapist (AMFT), which eases the path toward later licensure. The requirements for an Associate Marriage and Family Therapist are similar to those for full licensure but require verification of an internship/practicum of 500 hours of direct clinical experience with 100 hours of supervision, all of which will be applied to their overall licensure requirements.

Currently, there are 123 Marriage and Family Therapy programs accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) nationally; three of these programs are physically located within Georgia. Mercer University and Valdosta State

University have master's degree programs in Marriage and Family Therapy on their respective campuses. The University of Georgia has a PhD Marriage and Family Therapy Program at its Athens campus. Currently, there are 1,176 LMFTs and 116 AMFTs in Georgia.

## Recommendations

### 1. Problem

Statutory requirements for LMFT licensure are outdated and in need of revision due to COAMFTE's accreditation requirements having changed in 2021. Post graduate clinical experience required in OCGA 43-10A-13 is out of line with other states, making it difficult for out of state licensees/MFT graduates to receive licensure in Georgia. GAMFT has introduced HB 1599 during the 2022 legislative session, which revises OCGA 43-10A-13 to update training requirements and clinical hours needed for licensure in Georgia. The Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council (GORRC) reviewed proposed changes offered in this bill in September and October 2022, unanimously approving all of them. They recommended passage as submitted for legislative approval during the 2023 legislative session.

#### **Recommendation: Pass HB 1599 (2022) to Update Licensure Requirements for MFTs**

- a. Support passage of changes to MFT licensure requirements proposed in HB 1599 LC 33 9142 (2022).
  - o HB 1599 was introduced in 2022 by Chairman Alan Powell. It went through review by the Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council in the summer and autumn of 2022 and was approved unanimously without changes in October 2022. The final Report and Recommendation of the GORRC may be found [here](#).
  - o The GORRC Report found as follows at p. 4: "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.**" (emphasis added)
  - o HB 1599 would revise subsection (a) of Code Section 43-10A-13, relating to requirements for licensure in marriage and family therapy by updating coursework and practicum hours required in order to conform to those required by the national accrediting agency for AMFTs effective in 2022, and reducing the direct clinical experience for licensure as an LMFT to bring Georgia in line with the requirements of other states in this region.

### 2. Problem

The volume of applications to the Georgia Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage and Family Therapists has increased by approximately 65% since 2017 with no commensurate increase in staffing. There are currently five staff members supporting multiple separate licensure boards. The shortage of staff causes delays in the processing of applications.

In addition, the burden on Board members charged with reviewing applications has also grown tremendously. Increasing the representation of Board members sitting on the Composite Board, while retaining an equal number of Board representatives for each profession, would allow for increased speed in reviewing license applications. **Recommendations: Increase Staffing and Board Capacity to Review License Applications**

- a. Provide increased funding within the state budget for the Secretary of State Professional Licensing Division for additional staff support.
- b. Increase representation on the Composite Board by one person for each of the three professions governed by the Board. Minimal impact in budget related to per diem costs, etc. This addition will require statutory changes to OCGA 43-10A regarding Board representation. This would also require modifications in the statutory requirements for review and majority approval of licenses by Board members.

### **3. Problem**

The applications for AMFTs and LMFTs are out of date, unnecessarily complex, and often redundant. Additionally, the applications are at a minimum 17 pages long and must be printed and completed by hand unless the applicant owns special software. The complexity and handwritten nature of these applications are frequent contributors to mistakes or incomplete applications, issues that not only increase the burden on the Board staff, but also invariably delay application approval and the timely entrance of new professionals into the workforce.

#### **Recommendations: Shorten Simplify, and Computerize License Applications**

*Note that these changes would not require legislative action. The Board is working on addressing these issues.*

- a. Shorten and simplify the application for AMFTs and LMFTs.
- b. Create an online application that can be completed electronically and can log and store applicant information throughout the applicants' training and application process.
- c. Replace snail mail communications regarding applications with email communications in most instances, unless unavailable to the applicant.
- d. Create a direct online process for applicants to check their application status in order to easily identify errors and reduce the time staff uses to respond to applicant inquiries.
- e. Increase telephone and email access to Board staff to respond to questions from applicants.
- f. Provide for automatic approval of an applicant's educational and internship/practicum experiences for applicants who completed COAMFTE programs with a simplified and standardized method for Board staff to verify a program's COAMFTE accreditation based on information available on the COAMFTE website. Now each applicant has to confirm this same fact.
- g. Improve the ease of access to information and strengthen FAQs for applicants.
- h. Integrate the participation of professional associations, such as GAMFT, when improving application.

#### **4. Problem**

Georgia currently limits Medicaid eligibility for behavioral health providers who are MFTs, LPCs, LCSWs to serve patients only to children ages 0-21. This change was made by an amendment to the state plan in January 2022. Legislative action was not required. However, these behavioral health professionals are not authorized to bill Medicaid for providing services to adults.

#### **Recommendation: Medicaid Eligibility for Behavioral Health Providers**

- a. Expand eligibility for LMFTs, LPCs, and LCSWs to provide services to Medicaid eligible adults in order to increase access to mental health care for this population.

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