

Review of State Licensing Requirements  
House Bill No. 350  
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February 15, 2018

Mr. Chairman, members of the board, my name is Krysteena Stephens and I am here today to offer personal testimony in support of House Bill No.350 relating to revising licensing requirements for Associate Marriage and Family Therapists and Marriage and Family Therapists in the state of Idaho (Section 54-3405B, Idaho Code and Section 54-3405C, Idaho Code).

I stand here today as a pre-licensed Marriage & Family Therapist candidate. The term "pre-licensed," is important to open my discussion with as I am not a recent graduate as the term may assume. In fact, I graduated in 2012 and hold a master's degree in Marriage & Family Therapy. I have been practicing in various roles in the behavioral health field for the majority of the last six and a half years. I have thousands of hours of clinical work (as defined by rule) yet the state views and labels me as a registered intern.

When I moved to Idaho two and a half years ago I predicted there would be a hoop or two to jump through in order to transfer my graduate credits and therapy hours yet was not nearly prepared for where the next two years of unraveling information would take me. Here are some of the issues I faced:

- 1) Despite graduating from an accredited university, Idaho Statute Title 54-3405B determines that my coursework does not meet all criteria for state license requirements. To remove this barrier, I researched all universities in this state providing graduate coursework in marriage and family therapy in order to take additional courses to fulfill the needed 12 semester units. None of the programs in marriage and family therapy in this state could provide me with this specific coursework that was required. \$8,700 later, I eventually completed 18 additional quarter credits to fulfill the 12 semester unit requirement by this state.
- 2) Another barrier is listed under section 2 [54-3405B] in the same title that states, "Completion of one (1) year practicum of supervised marriage and family therapy experience, consisting of ... one hundred fifty (150) hours ... with couples or families, as part of the graduate program." The statute does not provide information pertaining to a person in my predicament who holds a master's degree and is not in practicum yet has not completed one hundred fifty (150) direct client contact hours with couples and families. When I approached the board with this question, even they were initially stumped. There is little flexibility in these qualifications and it does not address alternative circumstances .
- 3) Additionally, section 2 [54-3405B] requires students with minimal real-life therapy training to perform therapy with couples and families prior to graduating. Working with couples and families pose unique risks such as managing issues of domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, child custody battles, infidelity, and trauma that may be revealed while both perpetrator and victim are present in the room. According to the AAMFT Code of Ethics, [Standard 3.6; Standard 3.10] "... "Marriage and family therapists do not diagnose, treat, or advise on problems outside the recognized boundaries of their

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competencies." This is a highly complex and potentially high-risk population and should only be pursued once the therapist has, at minimum several hundred hours of training, strong knowledge of law and ethics, and enough competence to handle the ensuing chaos.

On paper, the qualifications for licensure for a marriage and family therapist are more than double the length as those for a licensed professional counselor or a licensed clinical social worker. House Bill No. 350 appears to eliminate all of the convoluted jargon of the statute, simplifies the language, and allows a board of individuals with substantial clinical knowledge to hold greater influence in making a sound judgment. These rules are set in place to protect the public and they need to be managed primarily by the board members who hold clinical experience and know the signs of therapeutic exploitation. We need to put the power back in the hands of the people who are on the ground floor. As Lt Governor Brad Little stated, "government always needs to do its part to protect citizens, but it also must make sure it does not interfere where it's not needed... Only the lightest possible hand."