



## MaMHCA

Massachusetts Mental Health Counselors Association, Inc.

17 Cocasset Street, Foxboro, MA 02035

Phone: 508-698-0010; Fax: 508-698-1711

[www.MaMHCA.org](http://www.MaMHCA.org)

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### Testimony in support of HB 1706 An Act establishing a board of registration of licensed mental health counselors

Dear Senator Cyr and Representative Decker, Co-Chairs, and members of the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery,

This legislation, sponsored by Rep. Josh Cutler (D-Duxbury), would establish a 9 member board of registration of mental health counselors and creating a first tier license for recently graduating students and removing the oversight away from the allied board of mental health services. This bill is vital to expanding support to mental health providers and provider organizations by streamlining the licensure process, clarifying the license requirements and expectations and improving overall efficiency within the licensing board.

#### **Background and Backlogs:**

Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHCs) have been steadily increasing in numbers over the past 10 years. LMHCs have reached over 6800 providers within the Commonwealth and the Allied Board has recently said they are receiving 100- 110 applications for LMHC license per month.

- **This places resource hardships on the Board of Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professions as they continue to oversee four other professions within the same board umbrella.**
- **In late 2018 and early 2019, MaMHCA provided volunteers to help the Board staff and Board members review a very substantial (6-month) backlog of applications.**
- **There is every likelihood that a backlog like this will occur again.**
- **Agencies and MassHealth were put in compromised conditions regarding their yet-to-be licensed staff.**

#### **Duty to the Consumer:**

- **Work regarding LMHCs including upgrading regulations, review of complaints and disciplinary cases, audits and review of license applications are currently being overseen by multiple disciplines outside of LMHCs.**
- **Consumer protection has been and is put at risk due to low attendance at Board meetings of other license disciplines**
- **The ability to have more LMHCs represented on a licensing board would help to ease the current work burden processing applications and other Board functions.**

**Creating an Entry Tier License:**

HB 1706 Would create an entry level License for MA graduates obtaining work experience to qualify for their LMHC license. We endorse the proposed title of the LSMHC – Licensed Supervised Mental Health Counselor, which would limit practice to within agencies and under supervision.

**An entry level license would serve multiple purposes:**

- There would be an increase in consumer protection through explicitly clarifying the counselor's role.
- It would promote Workforce Development by allowing entry level mental health counselors to become eligible for state and federal loan reimbursement programs
- It would provide agencies with post-MA individuals with ease of billing for workers in the LMHC track.

Please support HB 1706 to help ensure more efficient and streamlined consumer protection, professional oversight and workforce development.

Respectfully submitted,

*Midge Williams, LMHC, MaCCS*

**Midge Williams, MA, LMHC, MaCCS  
Executive Director**