

17 January 2026

**RE: Support for House Bill No. 7064**

Dear Committee,

My name is Grace Shepherd, and I am an Enhanced Outpatient Services (EOS), home- and community-based clinician with North American Family Institute (NAFI). I am currently licensed as an Associate Marriage and Family Therapist in the State of Rhode Island. My academic experience includes graduating with my Bachelor's from Rhode Island College in 2023 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Bachelor of Science in Behavioral Health Studies. I then earned my Masters of Science in Human Development and Family Science with a specialization in Couple and Family Therapy in 2025, where I obtained meaningful, supervised clinical experience. As a clinician who is personally affected by Rhode Island's current licensure requirements, I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill No. 7064, which has the potential to positively impact stakeholders around the state.

HB 7064 reduces direct client contact hour requirements for licensure, strengthens role-specific training by requiring a portion of supervised experience to be with couples and families, and reduces unnecessary barriers to licensure portability across states.

Some of the potential benefits of this bill include:

**Modernize RI Licensure Law Toward National and Regional Parity**

Rhode Island's direct client contact hour requirements for MFT licensure are among the highest in the nation and exceed the national average. Reducing the direct client contact hour requirement modernizes Rhode Island's licensure law in our profession and brings us closer to national norms.

More importantly, changes in HB 7064 make Rhode Island licensure more comparable to other states in our region—particularly Connecticut and Massachusetts—keeping Rhode Island competitive as therapists consider where to live and work. These updates are designed to make it more favorable for clinicians trained in Rhode Island to stay and practice in Rhode Island, rather than seeking licensure and employment in neighboring states.

Modernizing requirements also helps close potential loopholes that can arise when licensure standards differ substantially across neighboring states. Aligning Rhode Island's licensure expectations with the regional landscape reduces incentives for individuals to circumvent requirements elsewhere and then transfer back into Rhode Island, while still supporting fair and efficient mobility for qualified clinicians in good standing.

## **Removes Unnecessary Burdens for Licensure**

There is no evidence that excessive postgraduate supervision requirements produce higher-quality therapists. Higher numbers of required hours primarily serve to delay full licensure for clinicians who are otherwise qualified and ready to serve the mental health needs of our community. Reducing hours to be more in line with national and regional standards ensures a more accessible, streamlined pathway to licensure.

More accessible pathways to licensure reduce unnecessary burdens for candidates and may help attract and retain qualified therapists to provide care in Rhode Island rather than relocating to neighboring states where licensure laws are more favorable.

## **Improves License Portability**

Rhode Island is a small state within a highly interconnected region, and many Rhode Islanders live, work, and seek specialized services across state borders. In the digital age—where telehealth and cross-border continuity of care are increasingly common—reducing unnecessary barriers to dual licensure and endorsement simply makes sense for both clients and clinicians. I often work with clients whose work and family lives span neighboring state lines, and continuity of care can depend on clinicians like myself having reasonable pathways to licensure across borders. My systemically-focused work often includes connecting with clients' family members outside of the home, and with the current limitations, this can hinder the powerful work that my clients and I can accomplish. Additionally, some families need to move housing locations during our clinical work together. Oftentimes, change causes distress within the family system, and my inability to continue supporting them due to current limitations may come at a cost to clients' well-being.

## **Reflects Current Quality Standards**

HB 7064 preserves appropriate safeguards and strengthens role-specific training requirements in a way that supports public protection. While the bill moves Rhode Island toward parity by reducing the direct client contact hour requirement, it also requires that a portion of those hours be specifically focused on couples and families—appropriate to the license being granted. This provides meaningful quality control for the profession and supports the systems-focused scope of Marriage and Family Therapy practice.

This bill additionally updates language surrounding educational practicum requirements to reflect current standards set forth by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE).

As one of the few MFT professionals at my place of work, I strongly support this legislation. Many other states have pursued similar modernization efforts, and I am hopeful that Rhode

Island will continue to update licensure laws in a way that strengthens the workforce and improves access to mental health services for the benefit of people across our state.

**As such, I respectfully ask that you support HB 7064 and vote in its favor.**

Thank you for the work that you do in responding to the needs of your constituency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Grace Shepherd" followed by "M.S., LMFT-A".

**Grace Shepherd, M.S., LMFT-A**

Enhanced Outpatient Services Program (EOS) Clinician

North American Family Institute (NAFI)

Warwick, RI

(401) 595-2329 | [graceshepherd31@gmail.com](mailto:graceshepherd31@gmail.com)