

AAMFT Written Testimony in Support of S 3026

Rhode Island Senate Committee – April 2, 2026

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) represents more than 81,000 licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) nationwide. MFTs are licensed mental health professionals trained in psychotherapy and family systems, qualified to assess and treat mental and emotional disorders. Their clinical training uniquely emphasizes the role of relationships in individual and family well-being.

Rhode Island, like much of the nation, is currently experiencing a mental health provider shortage. According to Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) data updated in early 2026, four of Rhode Island's five counties are designated as experiencing shortages of mental health providers. While the shortage is not as severe as in some states, Rhode Island currently has approximately one mental health provider for every 210 residents—placing it behind regional neighbors such as Vermont, Maine, and Massachusetts, each of which has fewer than 200 residents per provider.

Licensure portability has been widely recognized—by both the Rhode Island General Assembly and professional organizations—as a critical strategy for addressing workforce shortages and expanding access to care. Removing unnecessary licensure barriers is essential to increasing access to qualified Marriage and Family Therapists while maintaining high professional standards.

S 3026 addresses these challenges in two important ways. By refining Rhode Island's initial licensure standards for MFTs, we are aligning the state with national standards, enabling Rhode Island to better attract and retain qualified mental health providers while maintaining a high level of competence. We are also addressing the regional nature of New England by ensuring stronger parity between neighboring states, helping Rhode Island attract needed providers. In the other proposed change, we seek to streamline licensure portability and remove barriers, recognizing the benefits of licensure portability that this legislature has already addressed for other mental health professions.

Licensure Portability

First, the bill streamlines licensure portability for Marriage and Family Therapists already licensed in other states. S 3026 reduces unnecessary barriers and delays by allowing MFTs licensed and in good standing elsewhere to become licensed in Rhode Island if they:

- Have at least one year of practice as an MFT in another state,
- Complete the standard Rhode Island licensure application, and
- Pay all required fees.

Once licensed, these practitioners will be fully subject to Rhode Island's continuing education requirements and regulatory oversight, including full supervision by the Board of Mental Health Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists. This approach mirrors licensure portability frameworks already adopted by the General Assembly for other mental health professions and recognizes the regional, cross-border nature of the New England workforce.

Updates to Initial Licensure Requirements

Second, S 3026 includes several targeted updates to Rhode Island's initial MFT licensure law designed to remove unnecessary barriers, streamline the licensure process, and promote regional parity. These changes include:

- Reducing required direct client contact hours from 2,000 to 1,500. Rhode Island's current requirement is among the highest in the nation and exceeds national norms. There is no evidence that excessive hours of supervised experience result in higher-quality clinicians; rather, they delay entry into the workforce without improving outcomes.
- Streamlining practicum requirements by aligning total practicum hours with standards established by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE).
- Adding differentiated licensure pathways for master's- and doctoral-level applicants, clarifying systemic therapy hour requirements, and allowing a limited number of pre-degree clinical hours.

Together, these updates modernize Rhode Island's licensure framework while maintaining appropriate professional standards. Given Rhode Island's proximity to neighboring states and the mobility of the mental health workforce, aligning licensure requirements regionally is both practical and necessary.

Conclusion

S 3026 will increase access to high-quality mental health care for Rhode Islanders by reducing unnecessary licensure barriers, improving workforce mobility, and ensuring that professional standards remain strong and appropriate. We believe this legislation strikes the right balance between access and accountability.

AAMFT would like to recognize Senator Murray for sponsoring this important legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration.