

10 March 2026

RE: Support for Senate Bill No. 3026

Dear Committee,

As a faculty member in the University of Rhode Island's Couple and Family Therapy Program and as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist-Associate who is personally affected by the present legislation, I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill No. 3026, which has the potential to positively impact stakeholders around the state. The bill realigns direct 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.

I completed my Master's degree in 2015, and was first licensed as a Marriage and Family Therapist in 2016 (equivalent to Rhode Island's Associate License). I earned my PhD in Couple and Family Therapy in 2018 and have provided clinical services continuously since 2016.

In my faculty role within a Couple and Family Therapy program, I supervise trainees and am a qualified supervisor with an AAMFT supervision credential. However, because my primary employment is in academia, my clinical practice has been necessarily part-time, which slows the pace at which I can accrue Rhode Island's required hours for independent licensure. As a result, I have spent many years practicing under supervision despite being an experienced clinician and supervisor. This limits my capacity to practice independently, become credentialed with insurance, and therefore limits the number and type of clients I may serve.

When I relocated from Kansas, Rhode Island's unusually high direct client contact hour requirement prevented me from qualifying for full LMFT licensure here. At the same time, I am fully licensed in Connecticut and Florida and meet full licensure requirements in many other states. In other words, I can supervise and train future therapists in Rhode Island, yet I remain unable to obtain full licensure in the very state where I live and work.

My experience illustrates the real barriers that excessively high postgraduate requirements can create for qualified clinicians, particularly those who contribute to the workforce in meaningful ways even when practicing part-time. For this reason, in addition to the policy considerations outlined below, I hope my personal experience will convince the committee to support this bill.

SB 3026 would:

Modernize RI Licensure Law Toward National and Regional Parity

- Rhode Island's direct hours requirements for MFT licensure are amongst the highest in the nation, exceeding 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 the present bill 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 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 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 hours 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 for licensure for therapists at the master's and doctoral levels reduce unnecessary burdens for license candidates and may attract or 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 with 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.

Reflects Current Quality Standards

- SB 3026 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 is an important level of quality control for our profession and ensures that Marriage and Family Therapists receive supervised experience consistent with the systems-focused scope of MFT 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 an MFT professional and educator, I strongly support this legislation. Many other states have adopted similar legislation as part of the [Access MFTs initiative](#), and I am hopeful that Rhode Island will seek to modernize our laws and improve licensure laws, and thereby mental health service provision, for the benefit of all people in our state.

As such, I respectfully ask that you support SB 3026 and vote in its favor.

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

Sincerely,

Jessica D Cless

Jessica Cless, PhD
Assistant Professor, Couple and Family Therapy Program
Department of Human Development and Family Science
College of Health Sciences
University of Rhode Island