

## **Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee**

### **SB 449 – Proponent**

**February 15, 2016**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Deborah Stidham, I am the Director of Addiction Treatment Services at the Johnson County Mental Health Center. I am here today as a member of the Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board (BSRB) representing Licensed Addiction Counselors.

The Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board (BSRB) has introduced SB 449 which proposes changes to the current statutes which govern the licensure of individuals working in behavioral health. My remarks will center on the proposed changes for addiction counselors.

One of the most significant changes proposed to the statute is the creation of the Licensed Masters Addiction Counselor level of licensure. Currently, there are two levels, one that requires a bachelor's degree and specific coursework in addictions and the other is a master's clinical level which requires a master's degree, specific coursework in addictions and a post-graduate practice. The clinical level of license allows a licensee to diagnosis and practice addiction counseling independently. The addition of the Master's Addiction Counselor, which would require a Master's degree and coursework in addictions, is allowed to work only under the direction of a clinically licensed individual. The Masters Addiction Counselor level mirrors the other professions licensed by the BSRB such as the Master Social Worker. The addition of the Master Addiction Counselor may very well serve to expand not only the capacity but also the quality of addiction services provided across the State. To effectively address the growing treatment needs of Kansans with co-occurring substance use disorders and mental health issues, it is important that we continue to expand opportunities for individuals to seek addiction counselor licensure.

For those individuals who possess a Master's degree and who are currently licensed by the BSRB as an Addiction Counselor will qualify for this new level of licensure with no application fee. One additional requirement will be for these individuals to take a 6 hour course in the diagnosis and treatment of substance use disorders prior to their application.

Another welcome change to the addiction counselor law pertains to state-to-state reciprocity. The amended language still requires the training and or experience to be equivalent to Kansas standards but makes greater allowance for the fact that other states have similar, but different avenues to demonstrating competency in addiction counseling.

In summary, the Addiction Counselor Act, which was enacted in 2011, marked a significant advancement for the field of addiction counseling in Kansas and has provided greater protection for the public who seek these services. These proposed changes take the field one step further by providing parity with the other BSRB professions and creating additional avenues for individuals to become licensed as an addiction counselor.

I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. I will stand for questions.