



**Testimony to Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare
on Senate Bill 217**

March 7, 2013

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition of Senate Bill 217. My name is Adam McCaffrey. I am currently a licensed master's level social worker, and a licensed addictions counselor. I have a master's degree in social work as well as a master's degree in counseling, and I am the Director of the Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Services Program at Pawnee Mental Health. I will share the positive impacts that the Addictions Counselor Licensure Act that went into effect on July 1, 2011, has had on addiction treatment as well as the negative impacts passing Senate Bill 217 would have on addiction treatment in Kansas.

The Addictions Counselor Licensure Act ensured that all clinicians providing treatment for addictions met a standard to be able to do this. This requirement is needed to make sure that clients seeking treatment for addiction will get treatment from a competent clinician. Having graduated with a degree in social work from Washburn University, I was well educated to be a "generalist" practitioner. However, it was during the time I spent getting supervision from a Licensed Clinical Addictions Counselor, and the time I spent studying to pass the exam required to become a licensed addictions counselor that I gained the knowledge needed to help clients with addictions. For example, an important part of being an addictions counselor is knowing the "pharmacology" that plays a part in providing treatment to clients who have substance issues. Knowing the classifications of substances, how each substance works, and how each substance affects a client is basic knowledge needed to help someone with an addictions problem. It is also important to be knowledgeable about the medical issues involved when going through withdrawal. There are some substances that cause a painful – but not life threatening – withdrawal. Withdrawal for other substances, however, can be life threatening and need medical attention. These were all things that I learned when getting my addictions license, things that were not taught to me when getting my master's degree in social work.

Another benefit that the Licensed Addictions Counseling Act has is to ensure that every two years licensed addiction counselors get 30 hours of continuing education related to addictions and treating addictions. Treating addictions, especially substances, requires information on the latest trends in drug use and what is being done to provide treatment for the changing trends.

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The most important benefit that the Addictions Counselor Licensure Act provided is protecting clients seeking treatment for addictions. Clients seeking treatment know that the clinicians they are seeing have had specialized training in addiction and are having on-going education about addiction treatment. The act also made sure that “not just anyone” could become an addictions counselor and provided a professional licensure for the field of addiction counseling. Having this licensure gives me confidence that when I hire someone who is either an LAC or LCAC, I am hiring a person who has shown himself or herself to be competent to treat addictions.

Senate Bill 217 would do away with all the listed benefits from the Addictions Counselor Licensure Act and have additional negative consequences to addiction treatment in Kansas. Operating as a community mental health center, we receive referrals for clients seeking treatment for addictions and also refer clients to other agencies for addictions treatment. At this time, other agencies know when they refer to our program we have licensed addictions therapists who are competent to treat the clients they are referring and vice versa. If Senate Bill 217 is passed we will not have the confidence that people we refer to other agencies are going to get a person competent in addiction treatment. Often times we get referrals from courts to provide court ordered treatment to clients. If Senate Bill 217 is passed the courts have no guarantee the person providing court ordered addictions treatment is competent to provide that treatment.

Another negative impact Senate Bill 217 has is undoing all the work current licensed addiction professionals have put in to be credentialed in this area. In the Prevention Treatment and Recovery Services Program at Pawnee we have eight therapists who are either Licensed Addictions Counselors or Licensed Clinical Addictions Counselors. They have devoted their time and money to studying for these licenses. Pawnee Mental Health Services has devoted resources to helping these clinicians get their licenses and keep their licenses. Even with the increased efforts it took to obtain these licenses and the additional effort to maintain their licenses, these eight clinicians and Pawnee Mental Health realized the worth of ensuring that our addictions therapists are competent to practice. Senate Bill 217 would allow anyone licensed by the BSRB to do the things current addiction professionals have spent a great deal of effort to be able to do. Senate Bill 217 would allow newly licensed masters level social workers to function at the same level as therapists who took extra classes pertaining to addiction in their masters programs and went through several years of supervision.

In closing, passing Senate Bill 217 takes away protection for clients seeking treatment for addictions. It makes it difficult to make referrals to other agencies for clients who have addictions and takes away the confidence the courts have when mandating individuals for treatment who have addictions. It allows anyone with a license to treat addictions whether they are trained in this specialized area or not. I urge you to oppose passage of this Bill.