

North Dakota Legislative Management
Human Services Committee, October 8, 2014

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Chairman Weiland and members of the interim Human Services Committee members, thank you for allowing us to come and speak with you today.

My name is Emily Coler Hanson and I am a licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT) in North Dakota. I work in Fargo at Prairie St. John's as a child and adolescent inpatient therapist. I meet with several families each week that have children in crisis due to mental health issues. I have worked for the Village Family Service Center in the past as an in-home therapist and for Southeast Human Service Center both as a Partnerships Care Coordinator and as a Transition Facilitator. I currently serve as the President of the North Dakota Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.

As a therapist who works with children from across North Dakota who are at the highest risk for severe emotional and behavioral issues and out of home placement. I see the struggles firsthand that families face when they are not able to find the mental health care their children need. In working with children, it is very difficult if not impossible to create lasting changes if we don't include their families. It is also hard to make these meaningful lasting changes if the care isn't readily accessible and close enough to home to allow for easy access. As an LMFT in North Dakota, I am currently limited in where I can go to provide this critical mental health care to children and need. I am further limited in the services I am able to provide. And as Larry Giese shared, these limits fly in the face of my qualifications.

At this time LMFT's are included in the century code as a professional license and association (Code 43-53), however, the other areas of the Century Code were not changed to reflect this law. This is a simple change that will have meaning, lasting and life-altering changes for children and families across our state.

I was raised in North Dakota, chose to go to college in North Dakota and plan to continue my career in North Dakota if I am given the opportunity for employment and reimbursement options that other mental health professions are given.

As you finalize your drafted bills, I ask you to think of these children and their families who are facing major challenges. Challenges I and my fellow LMFTs are trained to address. I strongly encourage you to include the following items in your bills for this legislative session. In doing so, you will take a huge step forward in improving access to mental health services in North Dakota.

On behalf of my fellow mental health professionals, I am strongly encouraging you to:

- Include Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists as “Qualified Mental Health Professionals”
- Direct the Department of Human Services to include LMFT's as eligible medical assistance providers
- Direct the Department of Human Services to adopt rules that include LMFT's as Advanced Clinical Specialists in the DHS system

I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.