



December 7, 2016

The Honorable Larry Gonzales
Chair
Texas Sunset Advisory Commission
P.O. Box 13066
Austin, TX 78711

Re: Review of the Texas State Board of Examiners of Marriage and Family Therapists

Dear Chairman Gonzales:

I am writing on behalf of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), the national association that represents the professional interests of over 62,000 licensed marriage and family therapists (MFTs) in the United States. AAMFT is affiliated with the Texas Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (TAMFT), AAMFT's chapter that represents the interests of MFTs in Texas. We are submitting these comments on behalf of all MFTs in Texas.

At the request of TAMFT, AAMFT has reviewed the Sunset staff report regarding the Texas State Board of Examiners of Marriage and Family Therapists (TSBEMFT), the Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors, and the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners. On behalf of our members in Texas, who are deeply concerned about the recommendations in this report, AAMFT strongly opposes the report's recommendation that the TSBEMFT, the current independent licensure board for MFTs, should be reconstituted as an advisory committee and transferred from an entity within the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR).

The TSBEMFT should remain a separate regulatory board and not have its functions absorbed by a state bureaucracy. This proposal will do nothing to enhance the protection of the public, and will not save the state any money. It is important that the MFT profession be regulated, under appropriate state supervision, by an independent licensure board that includes members of the profession who are very knowledgeable about the education, training, supervision, and practice of MFTs. Allowing those who are not MFTs to regulate MFTs will likely result in harm to the public by allowing unqualified individuals to obtain licensure or for unethical therapists to continue practicing in Texas. The TDLR has no experience in regulating the mental healthcare professions. The TDLR just started regulating seven health-related professions in October. We do not believe that a bureaucrat trained to regulate non-healthcare professions, such as water well drillers and auctioneers, will have the ability to adequately regulate MFTs, LPCs or LCSWs.

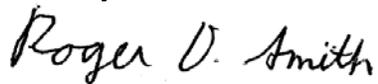
The proposal to turn the TSBEMFT into an advisory body and move the agency to the TDLR will not save the state any money. In terms of streamlining staff, it is difficult to see how administrative costs will decrease with a transfer to a new board. In particular, having state employees to take over the duties currently performed by TSBEMFT board members will result in a permanent increase in costs to the state. These costs include the salary, benefits, and long-term pension costs that the state will incur by hiring staff to take the place of functions currently handled by volunteers. In addition, the report did not include a detailed fiscal analysis of the cost

of this proposal. It is difficult to know the true cost of a recommendation of this magnitude without a detailed, independent analysis of the total costs to the state of such a move.

MFTs in Texas do support necessary reforms to the licensure board and licensure process. Regarding Issues 2 and 3 of this report, AAMFT is supportive of many of these recommendations. We note that all of the recommendations included in Issues 2 and 3 could be implemented within the current regulatory structure of the TSBEMFT.

Thank you for all of your work in reviewing the TSBEMFT and for allowing AAMFT to provide these comments. Please feel free to contact me at rsmith@aamft.org if you have any questions or if you need any additional information from AAMFT.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roger D. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R" at the beginning.

Roger D. Smith
Director of Government and Corporate Affairs & General Counsel
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy