



**Tennessee Association
for Marriage and Family Therapy**

A Division of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

**The Tennessee Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
Statement of Opposition to Senate Bill 1**

Senate Bill 1, sponsored by State Senator Jack Johnson (R-Franklin), would prohibit the Tennessee Board of Licensed Professional Counselors, Licensed Marital and Family Therapists, and Licensed Clinical Pastoral Therapists from referencing a national association's code of ethics in its governance. The impact of legislators removing or rewriting any profession's national code of ethics would be substantial and open both consumers and professionals to unnecessary harm and vulnerability.

The Tennessee Legislature has historically granted the hundreds of thousands of licensed professionals in Tennessee the ability to choose their own ethical codes that embrace best practice standards. Ethical standards are most beneficial, balanced, and enforceable when created, reviewed, and revised by committed members who are intimately acquainted with their particular and esteemed profession. Senate Bill 1 is unwanted and unnecessary governmental overreach into the territory of three distinct professions, professions comprised of Tennessee citizens who willingly chose these ethical codes with the blessing of the Tennessee legislature. *The question remains: why is this board now being singled out from the other 38 health related boards? And how would this impact the other professions regulated by 27 boards in Tennessee?*

The Tennessee Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (TNAMFT) stands adamantly opposed to Senate Bill 1 and any other public policy that may block or reduce consumer access to mental health care services. Our association is uncompromisingly opposed to any public policy that eliminates or diminishes the high national standards of mental health care created in the best interest of all Tennesseans and their families seeking those services.

This legislation jeopardizes the ability of Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, Licensed Professional Counselors, and Clinical Pastoral Therapists to practice. This is because health insurance companies and the Department of Defense recognize Licensed Marriage and Family Therapy professionals as worthy of reimbursement precisely because of our strict adherence to current national ethical codes. We expect that licensed professionals impacted by this legislation would be dropped as approved providers by insurance panels and by the Department of Defense if we are no longer governed by a national code. We would also expect our licensees to be rendered uninsurable for professional liability coverage. How could our licensees be expected to make a living without relying on these resources?

The passage of Senate Bill 1 will likely block or limit consumer access to mental health care services by creating a future in which there are fewer mental health providers available to consumers in Tennessee. For example, consumers who move from state to state are guaranteed continuity of care based on nationally accepted standards embraced by all ethical health care providers. Consumers would suffer interruptions and delays in their services when transferring to providers who do not have a shared standards of care. Additionally, we would expect the passage of this bill to place the employability of all three groups of mental health professionals at high risk by the State of Tennessee and medical facilities due to the necessity of meeting compliance standards.

Severely limiting mental health care delivery options would become negatively impactful for all Tennesseans. This is especially true for our most vulnerable citizens, resulting in a compounding of their already substantial burdens. Veterans and active military personnel are a prime examples of cherished citizens of this state who would be negatively impacted by such legislation. The typical wait time to enter into mental health care services at the Veterans Administration is between two to three months; therefore,

veterans and their families are forced to other providers for help, especially when there is a crisis. Current data states that 22 veterans complete suicide every day in the United States. Tennessee is currently greatly underserved in mental health care services, and its hard-working citizens deserve an increase, not a decrease, in the choices made available to them.

The passage of Senate Bill 1 could reduce or eliminate nationally embraced high standards of mental health care. The lack of ties to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) via adherence to our national code of ethics could disqualify Tennessee Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists from being Clinical Fellows and Approved Supervisors. This bill would grant undue influence of governance to legislators who lack knowledge, experience, and long term commitment to the profession of marriage and family therapy. Since 1962, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy has maintained effective pathways for its members to create and update its official Code of Ethics, and the Tennessee Association for Marriage and Family Therapy is not in want or need of an alternative pathway.

The ramifications for Tennesseans continue to compound. The Department of Education could disqualify graduate counseling training programs at universities who embrace or seek Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) accreditation standards. Credentialing and compliance standards could become unachievable at hospitals, addiction facilities, and nursing homes. Other states, who have not abandoned established codes of conduct, will likely refuse to honor the reciprocity of the Tennessee license, which would immediately impact tele-health practice in our state. Consumers and professionals in Tennessee would be deprived of the tremendous benefits of working with mental health professionals from other geographical locales who would bring in innovation and diversity in training and experience. Protections for marginalized groups of consumers could be entirely removed from the ethics standards. There are no provisions listed in Senate Bill 1 to protect consumers and professionals if referencing our current national codes of ethics becomes immediately illegal. The potential vulnerabilities created for both consumers and professionals are staggering.

The Tennessee Association for Marriage and Family Therapy respectfully asks Senator Johnson to withdraw this bill as it is unnecessary and unwanted governmental overreach into our mental health professions.

Respectfully Submitted January 10, 2017,
Tennessee Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
Legislative Committee
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