

September 3, 2020

**The Tennessee Association for Marriage and Family Therapy supports pre-licensed clinicians' ability to practice tele-therapy.** Access to the modality of tele-therapy creates opportunities for pre-licensed clinicians to accrue necessary hours toward licensure and necessary compensation for a living wage. The time between graduation and licensure is an especially vulnerable season in a clinician's career path. Pre-licensed clinicians typically carry large student loan debts upon graduation. Sometimes application fees and other seemingly straightforward steps truly become barriers to licensure application for this group of professionals during this early period. Graduates' pre-existing financial strain has been exacerbated by the economic hardships created by effects of the quarantine. The ability to practice tele-therapy further supports pre-licensed clinicians accrue necessary hours to complete their internships, and ultimately receive state licensure, enabling a wider range of job opportunities and the potential for participation of insurance panels.

Granting pre-licensed clinicians access to tele-therapy also creates incentives for recent in-state pre-licensed graduates to remain in the state, and out-of-state graduates to relocate to Tennessee. All consumers could benefit through an increase in access, availability, and range of mental health services. These pre-licensed clinicians can fill the critical service gaps in designated Mental Health Provider Shortage Areas across our state, many of which are rural areas. The modality of tele-therapy increases access to services for consumers who cannot attend live sessions due to health and quarantine vulnerabilities, are without easy or affordable access to transportation, are burdened with long drives to live sessions, or are experiencing urgent mental health crises.

Enabling pre-licensed clinicians access to tele therapy has the potential of benefitting thousands of Tennesseans.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the TNAMFT Board,

Robbie R. Hutchens

President

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