



House Bill 49 Testimony – Matt Fullen  
May 11, 2017

Good morning Chairman Hackett and Members of the Senate Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee, my name is Dr. Matthew Fullen, and I am a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor and Government Relations Chair of the Ohio Counseling Association. I am here to speak to you about House Bill 49, which as introduced, proposed the consolidation of three currently operating boards into one Behavioral Health Services and Social Worker Board.

The Ohio Counseling Association is very appreciative of the changes that the House made to Substitute House Bill 49. Keeping the current Counselor, Social Worker and Marriage and Family Therapist Board is very beneficial for the health of Ohioans, and we are asking that you keep the House changes included in Substitute House Bill 49.

The Governor's proposed change was suggested with the intent to save money for the taxpayers of Ohio, but it is important to note that the existing Boards are entirely self-sustaining through licensing fees. This drastic change would do nothing to save or generate any monies for the residents of Ohio. Indeed, the proposal could actually lead to increased licensing fees over time, costing more than the current system.

The current Counselor, Social Worker and Marriage and Family Therapist Board is comprised of 15 members from the three disciplines, 4 Counselors, 4 Marriage and Family Therapists, 5 Social Workers, and 2 Public members. While these disciplines are related, they each have specific areas of expertise, focus, training, and scopes of practice.

The current Board structure allows for each discipline's representatives to assist in the oversight of matters germane to their specific profession through Professional subcommittees. These committees help to review licensure applications, establish professional standards, investigate complaints by consumers, provide disciplinary actions for licensees, review continuing education programming and applications, and maintain the integrity of their professions. This is, as one might imagine, a monumental task when it is realized that there are currently between 9,000 and 10,000 Professional Counselors and Professional Clinical Counselors in the State of Ohio. The as introduced proposal would take responsibility for all of those licensees and place it in the hands of only one counselor on the Board or would transfer authority for the profession into the hands of those who are not counselors.

We believe that this would compromise the high standards that Ohio has always had for counselors in that others would be required to make decisions for a profession that they do not completely understand or that it would be an overwhelming task for the lone counselor on the proposed Board. This also is in direct opposition to the nature of professional boards to be autonomous and self-regulating, two historical characteristics of licensing boards.

The original consolidation plan would severely undermine the Board's core duty to protect and enhance the health, safety, and general welfare of the public. Currently, members of the Board serve as Professional Investigative Liaisons, and are charged with examining complaints lodged against members of our profession and assisting staff in making decisions about those charges. Each Liaison may need to review over a dozen cases per month.

If the number of counselors available to assist in this process is reduced, then again, standards could be lowered, which would create potential harm to the public. Because each discipline operates under their own set of standards, some stricter, some more lenient, there would potentially be a relaxing of requirements, which again would compromise community safety. Currently, our Board is structured in a manner that ensures integrity of the healthcare professionals they regulate. To our knowledge, there has not been a demonstrated need for change to a structure that is currently working as intended.

Because of these grave concerns, we are asking that you keep the House changes included in Substitute House Bill 49.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate your consideration of the perspective of the Ohio Counseling Association. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.