

Health and Human Services Committee
LB 344
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Good morning, Senator Riepe, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Thomas Williams (T-H-O-M-A-S W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S) and I am Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health for the Department of Health and Human Services. I am here to testify in support of LB 344 which is part of the Governor's Occupational Licensure Reform Legislation Package. Thank you, Senator Albrecht, for introducing this bill.

LB 344 provides alternative methods to obtain an Alcohol and Drug Counseling License or Mental Health Practice License in Nebraska through reciprocity. Nebraska currently allows for reciprocity only from a state or organization that is a member of the International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC). Nebraska, as well as 77 other groups have a membership agreement with IC&RC which allows the members to use the IC&RC examination for licensure purposes. As part of this agreement, licensing groups must agree that reciprocity will only be acceptable if the applicant comes from an organization that currently holds membership in the IC&RC. The proposed change will provide an alternative method to individuals who are licensed by a state or organization that is not a member of IC&RC to obtain licensure in Nebraska.

The bill includes additional degrees or substantially equivalent degrees to be considered acceptable for licensure as a mental health practitioner; to allow an applicant for provisional license to obtain employment and then register his/her supervisor and to remove the specific time frame in which supervised experience hours can be earned.

This proposed change will allow the Department, with the recommendation of the Board of Mental Health Practice, to determine equivalency of a master's degree for those programs that do not grant a master's degree while an applicant is pursuing the doctoral degree. *(Currently statutes require receipt of a master's or doctoral degree to qualify for licensure; however, there are doctoral programs that do not issue a master's degree. This change would allow applicants to qualify for a license prior to completing the doctoral program.)*

The bill will allow an individual to apply for a provisional license without having a supervisor in place at the time of application. *(Current regulations require that the applicant must begin employment and have a supervisor in place at the time s/he applies for a provisional license; this can cause delays in the application submission when a person needs to obtain employment first and also have a supervisor in place before submitting the application.)*

The bill involves removing the time frame in which 3,000 hours of experience must be gained prior to submitting the application for a mental health practice license or an independent mental health practice license. *(Currently statutes require that experience must be gained within 5 years of the application for mental health practice and not less than 2 years nor more than 5 years for independent mental health practitioners.)*

The bill will expand the listing of acceptable educational programs. A number of other accredited programs provide coursework in psychotherapy and assessment of mental

disorders. *(Currently if an applicant graduates from a program that is not listed as an accredited program under the regulations, the applicant must submit syllabi for each of the classes s/he took (at the time they took the classes) to meet the eight educational areas identified in regulations and then these descriptions must be reviewed for equivalency.)*

Finally, the bill will enhance mobility from state to state by substituting 5 years of practice after licensure in another state in lieu of the 3,000 hours of supervised experience earned after receipt of the degree and require successful passage of the Nebraska jurisprudence examination as a condition of reciprocity licensure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. We believe LB 344 will help DHHS continue in our mission of helping people live better lives. I ask the Committee to advance LB 344 to General file and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.