



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL
AND REHABILITATION SERVICES

Don Jordan, Secretary

Senate Public Health & Welfare Committee

March 9, 2010

HB 2577 – Licensure of Addiction Counselors

Disability & Behavioral Health Services

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Chairman Barnett and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present testimony on HB 2577. SRS supports HB 2577, which would make addictions counseling a licensed profession regulated by the Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board (BSRB). Licensing of addiction counselors would align the profession with social workers, marriage and family therapists, psychologists and licensed professional counselors. Twenty-three states already professionally license addiction counselors.

The practice of addictions counseling was first developed by people in long term recovery who wanted to provide support and guidance to others seeking recovery from substance use disorders. In 1993, legislation was passed which formally recognized addictions counseling as a profession and minimum standards were established for counselors working in licensed alcohol and drug treatment facilities.

In Kansas, the minimum requirement to practice addictions counseling is an associate's degree with 27 credit hours in substance use disorders. Successful passage of this bill would elevate the minimum requirement of an addiction counselor to a bachelor's degree with a corresponding increase in the number of hours required in substance use disorder coursework, including coursework in the diagnosis of substance use disorders. This would allow addiction counselors to not only treat, but also diagnose clients that may be in need of services.

The ability to provide a diagnosis is required for many private and public funds that reimburse for treatment of substance use disorders. As the Wellstone-Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act is implemented across private and public health plans, the demand for licensed clinical addiction counselors will become paramount. Consumers of alcohol and drug services deserve the protection that only licensure provides through legally enforceable standards of conduct.

Licensing of other professions in Kansas occurred as the result of the increased need for higher quality professional services. Licensure for the addictions counseling profession is needed now to ensure that the highest quality of care possible is provided to Kansans needing substance use disorder services.

Licensure will provide a needed workforce development ladder in the field to ensure an adequate pool exists for the delivery of addictions counseling services and will support retention rates of the current workforce.