Senate Health Policy Committee
Testimony
Senate Bill 5

September 24, 2008

Judith Kovach, PhD
Executive Director
Michigan Psychological Association

The purpose of SB 5 is to amend the Public Health Code to expand the scope of practice of marriage and family therapists to include psychotherapy with individuals, families, couples or groups as it relates to marital or family relations and the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders as they relate to marital or family relations.

The services that MFTs currently provide under Michigan law in Sec. 16901(1)c include "guidance, testing, discussions, therapy, or advice that is intended to avoid, eliminate, relieve, manage or resolve marital or family conflict or discord, to create, improve, or restore marital or family harmony, or to prepare couples for marriage." There is no doubt that these are valued and important services to couples, families and our communities. However, expanding the scope of practice of MFTs to include psychotherapy with individuals and the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of mental, emotional and behavioral disorders is outside the education and training of MFTs.

The Occupational Regulations Section of the Michigan Public Health Code sets the following educational requirements for licensure as a MFT:

1. 3 courses in family studies that total at least 6 semester or 9 quarter hours,
2. 3 courses in family therapy methodology that total at least 6 semester or 9 quarter hours,
3. 3 courses in human development, personality theory, or psychopathology that total at least 6 semester or 9 quarter hours,
4. at least 2 semester or 3 quarter hours in ethics, law and standards of professional practice, and
5. at least 2 semester or 3 quarter hours in research.

These requirements clearly are standards for providing marriage and family therapy and do not include the education and training that equip practitioners to diagnose and assess mental and emotional disorders or to provide psychotherapy to individuals with such disorders. The training of MFTs is in the amelioration of relational issues, rather than the treatment of mental and emotional disorders. There are no required courses in assessment or treatment

of mental, emotional or behavioral disorders. The public is not protected when the law permits providers without such education and training to deliver services to people with mental and emotional disorders.

Licensure as a MFT requires that individuals have a minimum of a Master's degree. Licensure as a Limited License Psychologist also requires a Master's degree but has the following educational requirements:

1. at least one course in assessment,
2. at least one course in treatment, and
3. one course in scientific and professional ethics and standards, equivalent to at least 3 semester hours, and
4. a practicum including 500 hours of psychological work.

Even with these specific requirements for licensure, LLPs are required to be supervised by a fully licensed doctoral level psychologist, whose education, training and experience is far more extensive.

The purpose of the Occupational Regulation Sections of the Michigan Public Health Code is to protect and promote the public health by setting minimum standards for the practice of health professions. The standards set for the practice of marriage and family therapy do not address the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders. Therefore, the Michigan Psychological Association opposes the enactment of SB 5.