



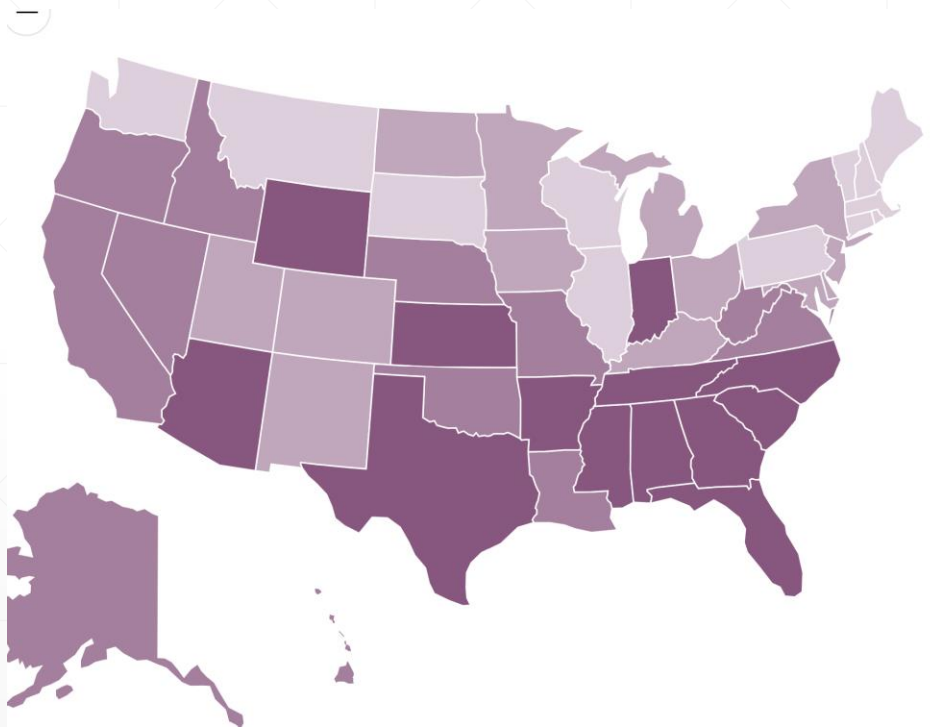
Legislative Advocacy 2024

Georgia Legislative Advocacy Webinar

January 26, 2024



Georgia 49th in US in Access to MH Care 2023



How can we increase access to MFTs using telehealth, practicing in multiple states, and those seeking to relocate?



Access MFTs

- **Advancing Portability for MFT Licensure**
- **Increasing Access to Mental Health Care for Georgians**
- **Growing Our Profession in Georgia**
- **Building Advocacy Capacity and Influence**

Addressing Licensure Barriers for MFTs



*House of Representatives
Rural Development Council*

Final Recommendations Overview

Mental Health Provider Qualifications

Research shows there are greater licensure requirements for some of Georgia's mental health professionals in contrast with surrounding states' requirements, to include: psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, licensed professional counselors, marriage and family therapists, and certified addiction counselors.

Recommendation

Instruct the licensing boards with authority to regulate these certifications to review and reform the existing requirements that prudently accelerate the placement of professionals in the field while maintaining professional standards and patient safety. Assemble any necessary Code revisions for recommendation to the General Assembly.

Change Seeking to Remove Licensure Barriers

- Senate Occupational Licensure Study Committee 2023
- DBHDD 2023 Workforce Study performed by Deloitte
- Senate Study Committee on Expanding Georgia's Workforce
- Senate Study Committee on Recruiting Rural Medical Personnel
- Secretary of State's Georgia Works Licensing Commission
- Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission

What Does SB 373 Do?

- *Seeks to remove barriers to the process of recognizing LMFTs licensed in other states to secure Georgia licensure.*
- **The Composite Board shall issue a licensure by endorsement to any individual seeking licensure as an MFT who:**
 - Holds a current valid and unrestricted MFT license to practice issued by another state
 - Is in good standing in the other state and not the subject of an investigation or disciplinary proceeding by a licensing board in the other state
 - Passes a criminal background check
 - Completes an application for licensure
 - Pays all applicable fees
- Once requirements have been met the Board must issue the license within 30 days.

License Requirements for MFTs Reflect National Standards

- All states license MFTs with substantially similar, if not identical requirements for licensure.
- COAMFTE is the national accrediting body determining the curriculum and practicum requirements for masters and doctorate education programs. They are adopted by law in 41 states and the remaining states defer to regionally accredited education institutions.
- Every state in the US requires MFTs to take the same national licensing exam provided by AAMFTRB, except California which uses its own examination which has been recognized as rigorous.

SB 373 Will Increase Access to MH Care:

- **This will increase access to mental health providers in Georgia as recommended by the House Rural Development Council's 2021 Report and Recommendations.**
- **SB 373 will ease the ability of licensees from other states to come to Georgia and be licensed to practice here without undue burden or delay.**
- **It will also reduce the non-productive burden on the MFT specialty members of the Board to determine whether another state's licensure requirements are "substantially equal" to Georgia's.**
- **SB 373 will protect patient safety and provider competence and promote increased access to desperately needed mental health care in Georgia.**

Senators Sponsoring SB 373

- **Larry Walker, III** (R-Perry) Chair of Insurance, Majority Caucus Secretary, Chair of Senate Occupational Licensing Study Committee, On Rules
- **Jason Anavitate** (R-Dallas) Majority Caucus Chair, On Rules
- **Kay Kirkpatrick** (R – Marietta) Chair of Children and Families, Vice Chair of Health, MD
- **Brian Strickland** (R-McDonough) Chair of Judiciary, Member of Senate Study Committee on Occupational Licensure
- **Sonya Halpern** (D –Atlanta) Member Senate Study Committee on Occupational Licensure
- **Elena Parent** (D – Atlanta) Senate Minority Caucus Chair, Attorney
- **Nan Orrock** (D- Atlanta) Minority Caucus Secretary, Member of Health Committee
- **Chuck Hufstetler** (R- Rome) Chair of Senate Finance Committee, Health and Rules
- **Kim Jackson** (D – Stone Mountain) On Health Committee, Episcopal Priest

Groups Supporting SB 373

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT)

Georgia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (GAMFT)

National Alliance on Mental Illness Georgia (NAMI Georgia)

Voices for Georgia's Children

Georgians for a Healthy Future

University of Georgia College of Family & Consumer Science, Dept of Human Development and Family Science

Valdosta State University, Marriage and Family Therapy Program

Resilient Georgia

CHRIS 180

Georgia Supportive Housing Association

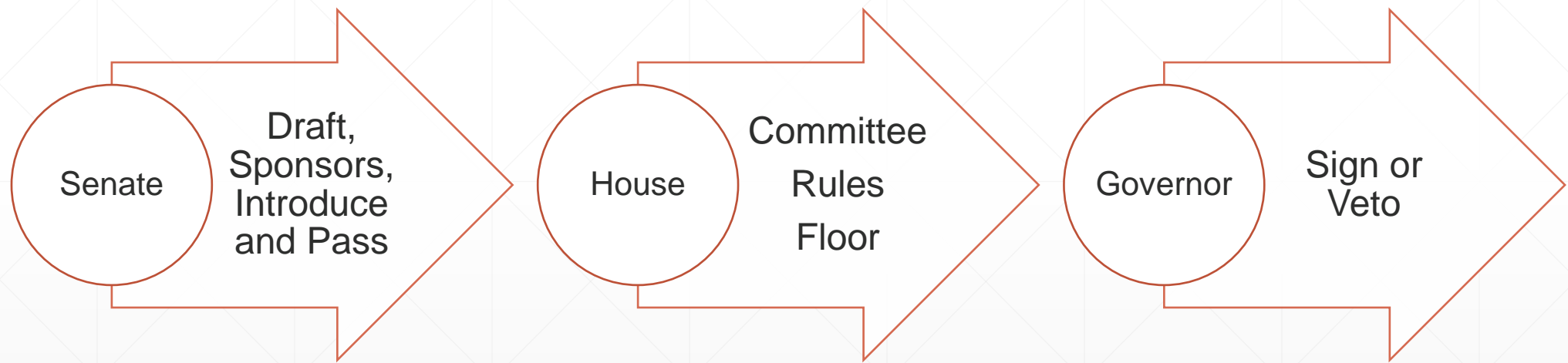
Georgia Mental Health Policy Partnership

Georgia Mountains Health

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Georgia Chapter

Grady

Roadmap to Success



What is the Process to Pass SB 373?

- **Introduced and assigned to Senate Regulated Industries Committee Wednesday.**
- **The Bill was heard in the full Committee Thursday and passed out unanimously!**
- **Now it is before the Senate Rules Committee that determines whether and when to move the bill to the Senate floor for a vote. This must happen before Feb. 29 -- Crossover Day -- the date by which all bills must pass from one chamber to the other in order to be eligible to pass this session. The bill can be amended in Rules or on the floor.**
- **Once it passes the Senate, it will be assigned to a House Committee (most likely Regulated Industries) and go through the same process of hearings, House Rules Committee, House floor. We are working with the author who carried HB 76 last year, Chairman Alan Powell (R-Hartwell), to carry SB 373 in the House.**
- **If there are no changes in the House, the bill then goes to the Governor for signature. If there are changes, it has to go back to the Senate for an agree/disagree, possible amendments, etc. until an identical version is approved by a majority of both the House and Senate.**

What Can I do to Help Pass SB 373?

- Identify who your House and Senate members are who represent you by going to <https://pluralpolicy.com/find-your-legislator/> and enter your home address.
- Click on their names and you will be linked to their bio and how to contact them at the capitol.
- Reach out to your Senate member by phone, email, or come to the capitol, and urge them to vote yes on SB 373, explaining that you are a constituent, that you are an MFT, what the bill would do and why you care.
- Contact your Senator, tell them you are a constituent, and ask them to vote “yes” on SB 373.
- Once in the House, contact your Representative and members of the [House Regulated Industries Committee](#). Urge them to vote “yes” to SB 373.
- Please take action when you receive legislative alerts from GAMFT.

Other GAMFT Advocacy

- **DCH expanded Medicaid coverage for FQHCs to include reimbursement for MFTs, LPCs, and Certified Peer Specialists.** Testifies, submitted written comments. Passed DCH. Waiting for CMS approval.
- **HB 520/2023 Comprehensive MH Bill** – Passed House overwhelmingly but did not advance in the Senate. This year, it will be a lot of several smaller bills.
- **Extend power to MFTs, LPCs, LCSWs and other ANPRNs and LPNs to evaluate people for guardianships and conservatorships.** (HB 291 in 2023 – will be added to a new Bill with the author's permission.)
- **Additional funding for professional licensing board in 2023.** More is needed.
- **Loan forgiveness and repayment extended beyond students to include MH professionals** – In HB 520; needs free standing legislation.
- **Network Adequacy.**

Children and Youth MH Provider Collaborative

- **Pediatricians convened all BH professional groups serving children and youth:**
 - **Pediatricians**
 - **Psychiatrists**
 - **Psychologists**
 - **LPCs**
 - **MFTs**
 - **LCSWs**
- **Meeting once a month to identify ways to strengthen access to care for this population, improve collaboration among professionals, etc.**

Thank You! Together We Can Succeed!

Questions? Comments?

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