

By Senator Gruters

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1                                   A bill to be entitled  
 2       An act relating to mental health professional  
 3       licensure; amending s. 491.005, F.S.; revising  
 4       educational requirements for marriage and family  
 5       therapist and mental health counselor licenses;  
 6       providing an effective date.

8 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

9  
 10       Section 1. Subsections (3) and (4) of section 491.005,  
 11 Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

12       491.005 Licensure by examination.—

13       (3) MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY.—Upon verification of  
 14       documentation and payment of a fee not to exceed \$200, as set by  
 15       board rule, plus the actual cost of the purchase of the  
 16       examination from the Association of Marital and Family Therapy  
 17       Regulatory Board, or similar national organization, the  
 18       department shall issue a license as a marriage and family  
 19       therapist to an applicant who the board certifies has met all of  
 20       the following criteria:

21       (a) ~~Has~~ Submitted an application and paid the appropriate  
 22       fee.

23       (b) 1. Attained one of the following:

24       a. A minimum of a master's degree in marriage and family  
 25       therapy from a program accredited by the Commission on  
 26       Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education.

27       b. A minimum of a master's degree with a major emphasis in  
 28       marriage and family therapy or a closely related field from a  
 29       university program accredited by the Council on Accreditation of

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30 Counseling and Related Educational Programs and graduate courses  
31 approved by the board.

32 c. ~~Has~~ A minimum of a master's degree with an ~~major~~  
33 emphasis in marriage and family therapy or a closely related  
34 field, with a degree conferred before September 1, 2027, from an  
35 institutionally accredited college or university ~~from a program~~  
36 ~~accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and~~  
37 ~~Family Therapy Education or from a Florida university program~~  
38 ~~accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and~~  
39 ~~Related Educational Programs and graduate courses approved by~~  
40 ~~the board of Clinical Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy,~~  
41 ~~and Mental Health Counseling.~~

42 2. If the course title that appears on the applicant's  
43 transcript does not clearly identify the content of the  
44 coursework, the applicant must ~~shall~~ provide additional  
45 documentation, including, but not limited to, a syllabus or  
46 catalog description published for the course. The required  
47 master's degree must have been received in an institution of  
48 higher education that, at the time the applicant graduated, was  
49 fully accredited by a regional accrediting body recognized by  
50 the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation or  
51 publicly recognized as a member in good standing with the  
52 Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, or an  
53 institution of higher education located outside the United  
54 States and Canada which, at the time the applicant was enrolled  
55 and at the time the applicant graduated, maintained a standard  
56 of training substantially equivalent to the standards of  
57 training of those institutions in the United States which are  
58 accredited by a regional accrediting body recognized by the

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59 Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation. Such  
60 foreign education and training must have been received in an  
61 institution or program of higher education officially recognized  
62 by the government of the country in which it is located as an  
63 institution or program to train students to practice as  
64 professional marriage and family therapists or psychotherapists.  
65 The applicant has the burden of establishing that the  
66 requirements of this provision have been met, and the board  
67 shall require documentation, such as an evaluation by a foreign  
68 equivalency determination service, as evidence that the  
69 applicant's graduate degree program and education were  
70 equivalent to an accredited program in this country. An  
71 applicant with a master's degree from a program that did not  
72 emphasize marriage and family therapy may complete the  
73 coursework requirement in a training institution fully  
74 accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and  
75 Family Therapy Education recognized by the United States  
76 Department of Education.

77 (c) Completed ~~Has had~~ at least 2 years of clinical  
78 experience during which 50 percent of the applicant's clients  
79 were receiving marriage and family therapy services, which must  
80 be at the post-master's level under the supervision of a  
81 licensed marriage and family therapist with at least 5 years of  
82 experience, or the equivalent, who is a qualified supervisor as  
83 determined by the board. An individual who intends to practice  
84 in Florida to satisfy the clinical experience requirements must  
85 register pursuant to s. 491.0045 before commencing practice. If  
86 a graduate has a master's degree with a major emphasis in  
87 marriage and family therapy or a closely related field which did

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88 not include all of the coursework required by paragraph (b),  
89 credit for the post-master's level clinical experience may not  
90 commence until the applicant has completed a minimum of 10 of  
91 the courses required by paragraph (b), as determined by the  
92 board, and at least 6 semester hours or 9 quarter hours of the  
93 course credits must have been completed in the area of marriage  
94 and family systems, theories, or techniques. Within the 2 years  
95 of required experience, the applicant shall provide direct  
96 individual, group, or family therapy and counseling to cases  
97 including those involving unmarried dyads, married couples,  
98 separating and divorcing couples, and family groups that include  
99 children. A doctoral internship may be applied toward the  
100 clinical experience requirement. A licensed mental health  
101 professional must be on the premises when clinical services are  
102 provided by a registered intern in a private practice setting.

103 (d) ~~Has~~ Passed a theory and practice examination provided  
104 by the department.

105 (e) ~~Has~~ Demonstrated, in a manner designated by board rule,  
106 knowledge of the laws and rules governing the practice of  
107 clinical social work, marriage and family therapy, and mental  
108 health counseling.

109  
110 For the purposes of dual licensure, the department shall license  
111 as a marriage and family therapist any person who meets the  
112 requirements of s. 491.0057. Fees for dual licensure may not  
113 exceed those stated in this subsection.

114 (4) MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING.—Upon verification of  
115 documentation and payment of a fee not to exceed \$200, as set by  
116 board rule, plus the actual per applicant cost of purchase of

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117 the examination from the National Board for Certified Counselors  
118 or its successor organization, the department shall issue a  
119 license as a mental health counselor to an applicant who the  
120 board certifies has met all of the following criteria:

121 (a) ~~Has~~ Submitted an application and paid the appropriate  
122 fee.

123 (b)1. Attained ~~Has~~ a minimum of an earned master's degree  
124 from a mental health counseling program accredited by the  
125 Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related  
126 Educational Programs which consists of at least 60 semester  
127 hours or 80 quarter hours of clinical and didactic instruction,  
128 including a course in human sexuality and a course in substance  
129 abuse. If the master's degree is earned from a program related  
130 to the practice of mental health counseling which is not  
131 accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling  
132 and Related Educational Programs, then the coursework and  
133 practicum, internship, or fieldwork must consist of at least 60  
134 semester hours or 80 quarter hours and meet all of the following  
135 requirements:

136 a. Thirty-three semester hours or 44 quarter hours of  
137 graduate coursework, which must include a minimum of 3 semester  
138 hours or 4 quarter hours of graduate-level coursework in each of  
139 the following 11 content areas: counseling theories and  
140 practice; human growth and development; diagnosis and treatment  
141 of psychopathology; human sexuality; group theories and  
142 practice; individual evaluation and assessment; career and  
143 lifestyle assessment; research and program evaluation; social  
144 and cultural foundations; substance abuse; and legal, ethical,  
145 and professional standards issues in the practice of mental

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146 health counseling. Courses in research, thesis or dissertation  
147 work, practicums, internships, or fieldwork may not be applied  
148 toward this requirement.

149 b. A minimum of 3 semester hours or 4 quarter hours of  
150 graduate-level coursework addressing diagnostic processes,  
151 including differential diagnosis and the use of the current  
152 diagnostic tools, such as the current edition of the American  
153 Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of  
154 Mental Disorders. The graduate program must have emphasized the  
155 common core curricular experience.

156 c. The equivalent, as determined by the board, of at least  
157 700 hours of university-sponsored supervised clinical practicum,  
158 internship, or field experience that includes at least 280 hours  
159 of direct client services, as required in the accrediting  
160 standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and  
161 Related Educational Programs for mental health counseling  
162 programs. This experience may not be used to satisfy the post-  
163 master's clinical experience requirement.

164 2. ~~Has~~ Provided additional documentation if a course title  
165 that appears on the applicant's transcript does not clearly  
166 identify the content of the coursework. The documentation must  
167 include, but is not limited to, a syllabus or catalog  
168 description published for the course.

169  
170 Education and training in mental health counseling must have  
171 been received in an institution of higher education that, at the  
172 time the applicant graduated, was fully accredited by a regional  
173 accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education  
174 Accreditation or its successor organization or publicly

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175 recognized as a member in good standing with the Association of  
176 Universities and Colleges of Canada, or an institution of higher  
177 education located outside the United States and Canada which, at  
178 the time the applicant was enrolled and at the time the  
179 applicant graduated, maintained a standard of training  
180 substantially equivalent to the standards of training of those  
181 institutions in the United States which are accredited by a  
182 regional accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher  
183 Education Accreditation or its successor organization. Such  
184 foreign education and training must have been received in an  
185 institution or program of higher education officially recognized  
186 by the government of the country in which it is located as an  
187 institution or program to train students to practice as mental  
188 health counselors. The applicant has the burden of establishing  
189 that the requirements of this provision have been met, and the  
190 board shall require documentation, such as an evaluation by a  
191 foreign equivalency determination service, as evidence that the  
192 applicant's graduate degree program and education were  
193 equivalent to an accredited program in this country. Beginning  
194 July 1, 2025, an applicant must have a master's degree from a  
195 program that is accredited by the Council for Accreditation of  
196 Counseling and Related Educational Programs, the Masters in  
197 Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council, or an  
198 equivalent accrediting body which consists of at least 60  
199 semester hours or 80 quarter hours to apply for licensure under  
200 this paragraph.

201 (c) Completed ~~Has had~~ at least 2 years of clinical  
202 experience in mental health counseling, which must be at the  
203 post-master's level under the supervision of a licensed mental

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204 health counselor or the equivalent who is a qualified supervisor  
205 as determined by the board. An individual who intends to  
206 practice in Florida to satisfy the clinical experience  
207 requirements must register pursuant to s. 491.0045 before  
208 commencing practice. If a graduate has a master's degree with a  
209 major related to the practice of mental health counseling which  
210 did not include all the coursework required under sub-  
211 subparagraphs (b)1.a. and b., credit for the post-master's level  
212 clinical experience may not commence until the applicant has  
213 completed a minimum of seven of the courses required under sub-  
214 subparagraphs (b)1.a. and b., as determined by the board, one of  
215 which must be a course in psychopathology or abnormal  
216 psychology. A doctoral internship may be applied toward the  
217 clinical experience requirement. A licensed mental health  
218 professional must be on the premises when clinical services are  
219 provided by a registered intern in a private practice setting.

220 (d) ~~Has~~ Passed a theory and practice examination provided  
221 by the department for this purpose.

222 (e) ~~Has~~ Demonstrated, in a manner designated by board rule,  
223 knowledge of the laws and rules governing the practice of  
224 clinical social work, marriage and family therapy, and mental  
225 health counseling.

226 Section 2. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law.