

September 10, 2023

Utah State Legislature Business and Labor Interim Committee 2023:

Sen. Curtis S. Bramble (Chair), Rep. A. Cory Maloy, Sen. Kirk A. Cullimore, Sen. Karen Kwan, Sen. Daniel McCay, Sen. Scott D. Sandall, Sen. Todd D. Weiler, Rep. Melissa G. Ballard, Rep. Brady Brammer, Rep. Walt Brooks, Rep. Jefferson S. Burton, Rep. Jon Hawkins, Rep. Brian S. King, Rep. Karianne Lisonbee, Rep. Ashlee Matthews, Rep. Mike Schultz, Rep. Jeffrey D. Stenquist, Rep. Keven J. Stratton, Rep. Mark A. Strong, Rep. Norman K. Thurston, Rep. Stephen L. Whyte, Rep. Ryan D. Wilcox

Official Statement Regarding OPLR Preliminary Recommendations

The Utah Coalition of Mental Health Professionals (UCMHP) was established in 2019 to create greater unity across mental health professions through increased cross-discipline training/supervision and engaging in advocacy/legislative efforts that will improve our professions. Our primary goal is to enhance the mental health workforce to better support the Utah public with access to behavioral health services. All of our professional associations are licensed under the Mental Health Professional Practice Act [58-60-102](#).

Each of the three associations have been involved with the Office of Professional Licensing Review (OPLR) since 2022 and have provided input to Jeff Shumway and his team throughout this process. We have appreciated the cooperative efforts of the OPLR team as we have explored opportunities to increase public access to mental health services and enhance public safety. As noted below, we fully sustain the OPLR initiative and support their work.

Our associations offer the same to the Health and Human Services Interim Committee as bill files are being prepared. We know that our expertise and solutions-focused approach will benefit the legislative process.

We have reviewed the OPLR Preliminary Recommendations collaboratively and wanted to share our response and recommendations for further discussion as we all share the same goal of increasing access to mental health services while improving consumer safety

1. UCMHP is in support of improving supervisor requirements and requiring additional training on supervision. We have recommendations to this process modeling after the Marriage and Family Therapy supervision model which we feel would be effective and meet OPLR requirements. We are extremely concerned about the inconsistencies in supervision quality across our professions.
2. UCMHP is in support of increasing the required direct client contact hours, increasing direct clinical supervision hours, and encouraging direct observation during supervision, with some exceptions based on setting. We have some initial concerns about eliminating general experience hours related to a licensee's ability to obtain insurance paneling (especially Medicare).

3. UCMHP is in support of creating an alternative pathway around clinical examination requirements for all professions. However, this will require a high level of education for students and initially licensed mental health therapists (which we will help with) because an alternative pathway license will limit participation with insurance reimbursement, compact participation, and licensure portability.
4. UCMHP supports interstate compacts. The Counseling Compact has already been enacted in Utah and UCMHP will support the Social Work Compact.
5. UCMHP supports the Master of Addiction Counseling as a new master's level mental health therapist license.
6. UCMHP is in support of enabling behavioral health professionals to use the Utah Health Professionals Program and to increase safety checks upon licensure, education to clients, and routinely throughout the renewal process.
7. UCMHP would like to learn more about how the legislature will streamline the regulatory structure and governance. We support a multi-profession board to fulfill board policy functions. For direct licensing and enforcement functions, we have suggestions about how to implement this. It is complicated due to the differences in ethical codes amongst our professions. We would welcome involvement in this process and offer our combined expertise to establish a regulatory body that ensures public safety and holds licensees accountable.
8. UCMHP is in support of closing gaps in care through creating additional licenses/certifications for behavioral health extenders. We offer our expertise in establishing the scope of practice for these licenses/certifications. Our input into how the behavioral health systems currently operate and how such individuals are currently utilized to enhance mental health care to increase access to the public will be invaluable.

In summary, the Utah Coalition of Mental Health Professionals is in support of nearly all of OPLR's recommendations and we would like to work with the Health and Human Services Interim Committee as the legislative language is drafted to ensure that:

- the intent of these recommendations is maintained,
- the forthcoming bills will both increase safety and access to Utahans seeking mental health treatment,
- we identify and address any unintended consequences from the legislation,
- we can advocate with you during the upcoming legislative session.

We are available to discuss our recommendations at the Health and Human Services Interim Committee meeting on September 18, 2023, and/or to schedule a meeting with members of the committee.

Thank you,

The Utah Coalition of Mental Health Professionals

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