



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Assembly Passes Bill Expanding Access to Mental Health Services in Schools *AB 251 allows Marriage and Family Therapists to obtain DPI licensing to work in schools*

Madison, WI – Today, the Wisconsin State Assembly passed Assembly Bill 251. This bill will allow properly credentialed Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) to obtain a Tier 1 license through the Department of Public Instruction, allowing them to be directly hired by school districts to serve students. The bill, authored by State Representative David Steffen (R-Howard) and State Senator Jesse James (R-Altoona), received bipartisan support in the Assembly and will help alleviate the shortfall of counselors in our school system by utilizing existing mental health professionals.

“Governor Evers declared 2023 the Year of Mental Health. Assembly Bill 251 aligns with that focus and is a creative solution for improving access to mental health services in our schools. MFTs are highly trained and qualified to serve the mental health needs of kids and families. This bill simply creates another option for schools as they determine how best to meet the mental health needs of their students,” said Rep. Steffen.

According to the American School Counselor Association, the recommended student-to-counselor ratio is 250-to-1. Wisconsin is currently at a ratio of 387-to-1 and the state is expected to need 1,500 more counselors in the next five years. While MFTs are already widely accepted as appropriately qualified to serve in schools, they currently can only be hired to work in a school via a third party—an inefficient and burdensome process. AB 251 makes accessing MFT services in schools easier by allowing MFTs to be licensed through DPI and hired directly by districts.

“We need to find new, innovative ways to help support our kids during a time of crisis. This legislation does just that by expanding the pool of eligible mental health professionals that can work in a school setting. This is simply an option, an opportunity to try and get more mental health professionals who are qualified into schools to get our kiddos the services they need,” said Senator James.

Assembly Bill 251 will now move on for voting action in the State Senate.

For more information please contact Representative Steffen or Senator James. Their offices can be reached at Rep.Steffen@legis.wisconsin.gov or Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov.

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