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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 4TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 10, 2024

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Creative Solution to Shortage of Mental Health Services in Schools Becomes Law *Licensing pathway expands service options without creating costly new programs*

Madison, WI – Legislation authored by State Representative David Steffen (R-Howard) and State Senator Jesse James (R-Altoona) that allows Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) to obtain state licensing to work directly in schools has been signed into law. Act 196 allows properly credentialed MFTs to obtain a license through the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), allowing them to be directly hired by school districts to serve the mental health needs of students.

“Expanding mental healthcare options and utilizing existing, qualified professionals is critical to ensuring our students are receiving the services they need. Rather than creating a costly new government-run program, this legislation recognizes the pool of highly trained Marriage and Family Therapists who are ready and able to support our students today,” 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 366-to-1 and the state is expected to need 1,500 more counselors in the next several years. While MFTs are already widely accepted as appropriately qualified to serve in schools, prior to Act 196 they could only be hired to work in a school via a third party—an inefficient and burdensome process. Act 196 makes accessing MFT services in schools easier by allowing MFTs to be licensed through DPI and hired directly by districts.

“This is an innovative solution that will help connect kids who are in crisis with the resources they need. I’m proud to see our state taking steps to address this important issue,” said Rep. Steffen.

For more information, please contact the office of Representative Steffen at (608)237-9104 or Rep.Steffen@legis.wisconsin.gov.

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